

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AND THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

CHRISTIAN YOGA AS A PRODUCT OF HINDUISM
AND THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

A general dissatisfaction with modern life here in the West has resulted in a greatly increased interest in Eastern spirituality and culture. Many in today's Western world want to transform their rational and analytic culture—a culture that appears to hold no hope of creating Utopia—into an emotional and synthetic one. For that reason popular Western culture has become diluted with many aspects of Eastern culture, including Eastern music, TV drama, film, and especially Eastern mysticism. Results include the “New Age movement,” religious pluralism, a rejection of traditional Christianity, and for a steadily increasing percentage of the population, a fascination with and a devotion to an ancient genus of Hinduism known as “Yoga.”

Western culture in the Twenty-First Century remains pragmatic. For most, health and prosperity are beloved icons, considered the only meaningful barometers of success and happiness, far outweighing the intangible benefits that may or may not accompany morality and objective truth. Many churches are similarly worshiping pragmatism, and are now willing to look at novel “gospels,” choosing to view them as a gift from God that can aid in their development and popularity. These innovative Western churches are introducing to their congregations different forms of Eastern mysticism, including Yoga, which some regard as a new tool to assist with evangelism programs. Indeed, Christian Yoga programs are becoming increasingly popular with Western church leaders, and their members.¹

Many observers who prefer to practice a Bible-based form of Christianity, i.e. orthodox Christians, have become alarmed at the growing number of those who also identify themselves as Christians who have become deeply involved with the practice of Yoga. Popular Christian yogis (teachers) are producing Yoga books, DVDs, and seminars for curious Christians, and teaching

¹ Caryl Matrisciana, *Out of India: A True Story About the New Age Movement* (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publications, 2008), 182.

their disciples Yoga programs at local churches and in liberal seminaries.² Orthodox Christians, also known as “Christian Fundamentalists,” are asking this important question: Can a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ, i.e. a *genuine* Christian, benefit from the practice Yoga, an alien collection of spiritual and physical exercises whose dogmas are rooted in historical Hinduism? The Apostle Paul wrote, “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the work of God and prayer.”³ Would the Apostle conclude that the several physical and psychological benefits that many have derived from the practice of Yoga to be God’s common grace?⁴ Or would he have regarded the practice of Yoga as among the wiles of Satan, a pseudo-Christian attraction designed to lure believers *away* from God? The purpose of this paper is to provide biblically-based answers to these serious questions.

The below study is divided into four main parts. Chapter one is concerned with Yoga’s ancestry, and will focus on the ancient Hindu origins of modern Yoga practice. A brief look at Indian history and several sacred Hindu texts will reveal the meaning and purposes of Yoga.

Chapter two examines the socio-cultural-religious phenomenon that Yoga has become. The purposes and processes that have caused Eastern Yoga to migrate to the Western world—especially to America—will be surveyed. This chapter will also look at the influence of popular Hindu yogis, including icons like Mohandas Gandhi, and Swami Vivekananda. Chapter two discusses other features of popular Hindu culture that have attracted great attention in the West, including Indian music and movies, the Eastern influence on Twentieth Century American Hippies, the Hare Krishna and Transcendental Meditation movements. In addition, this chapter will

² Proponents of Christian yoga include Susan Bordenkicher, Brook Boon, and Nancy Roth.

³ 1 Timothy 4:4-5.

⁴ Susan Bordenkircher, *Yoga for Christians: A Christ-Centered Approach to Physical and Spiritual Health* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2006), 4

introduce some of the practical teachings of Yoga in the Western world, and name the most popular types of Yoga currently being practiced in the United States of America.

Chapter three concerns the origins, meaning, and detailed methods of Christian Yoga. The chapter looks at special Yoga breathing practices, and mystic meditative prayer, especially as they contrast with biblically-based meditative prayer. Several examples of Christian Yoga methods are also discussed in this chapter.

The last chapter is an apologetic for biblically-based Christianity. Any understanding of the scriptures that is derived from a traditional, i.e. historical-grammatical approach to hermeneutics makes it abundantly clear that the practice of Yoga is in irremediable conflict with the practice of orthodox (Bible-based) Christianity. In the opinion of this writer and most other Christian Traditionists, Christians would do well to reject emotionalism and mysticism, and hold on firmly to the Biblical doctrines and Christian practices that are rooted securely in historical and objective truths.

Resources accessed for this project include several Liberty University library books; inter-library loan materials; the “Net Library;” as well as numerous other reliable Internet sources. Because space is limited and the focus of this thesis is elsewhere, the history of Hinduism will be only briefly summarized. Additionally, the examples of Christian Yoga presented below are intended to be representative, not exhaustive.

The New Age movement, which includes the phenomenon of Yoga, is openly challenging the doctrines and practices of traditional, orthodox Christianity. The operating thesis of this paper is that the proper response to these and similar challenges is to be found in God’s Word, the Bible.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ORIGIN OF HINDU YOGA PRACTICE

Yoga practice has become a very popular activity as an ever-increasing number of Western Yoga practitioners use it to improve physical health and for psychological relaxation. Yoga, however, was not originally designed for physical and psychological benefits. Yoga was designed, trained, and spread to promote a particular type of Eastern religion and spirituality. Author Ronald Enroch observed “Yoga’s worldview assumes that the basic human problem is neither biological nor moral but metaphysical.”⁵ Contrary to popular opinion, Yoga is not a simple stretching technique, but a complex *religious practice*. This chapter will survey some of the characteristics of Hinduism, upon which Yoga was founded. In addition, the true meaning of the term “Yoga” will be discussed, which according to some Hindu sacred texts involves liberation from bondage. Finally, it will be observed that the main purpose of various forms of Yoga is union with God through sacred texts, and through practical Yoga experiences.

Yoga: Traceable to Ancient Hinduism

Hinduism is several thousand years old and holds the distinction of being the most ancient of the world’s living religions.⁶ Hinduism is a combination of beliefs and institutions that have appeared over the centuries. However, even though the religion has been around for thousands of years, there is no firm definition of Hinduism.⁷ In contrast to Christianity, Hinduism “does not have a single founder, a specific theological system, a single system of morality, or a central

⁵ Ronald M. Enroch, *A Guide to New Religious Movements* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 44.

⁶ Bhaskarananda, *The Essentials of Hinduism: A Comprehensive Overview of the World's Oldest Religion* (Seattle: Viveka Press, 2002), 1.

⁷ Mangal Man Maharjan, *Comparative Study of Hinduism and Christianity in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Ekta Books, 2002), 17.

religious organization.”⁸ Hinduism is in fact a diverse conglomeration of ancient Indian religious traditions.⁹

Indian thought and practice is rooted in *Rig Veda*, the oldest and most important literary collection, known as wisdom verses. The *Rig Veda* is the source of many keen insights into human nature. It also contains a religious ritual system which is still in current use.¹⁰ But if the *Rig Veda* lays at the foundation of Indian thought and culture, where did the *Rig Veda* come from?

The development of the *Vedic* view was influenced by the ancient Indus civilization in its thought and culture. The Indus civilization is believed to have begun in the Indus Valley around 3000 B.C. Over 1000 years the Indus civilization developed more quickly and became larger than those of Egypt and Mesopotamia. As the Indus people spread out, they influenced the developing *Vedic* culture and contributed much to the later growth of a particular Indian tradition.¹¹ The Indus religious contribution to Hinduism includes worship of “the Mother Goddess”, the source of cosmic creative energy, and a host of indigenous village spirits and familiar Yoga postures.¹²

Veda influenced by the Indus civilization is believed to have been composed between 1900 and 1500 B.C. *Veda* in Sanskrit means “wisdom,” or “knowledge.” It is believed that when people recite, meditate on, and chant from the *Veda* as a sacred liturgy they can obtain creative wisdom and reach the energy of the Divine Reality.¹³ Herman said “The *Rig Veda* mantras or

⁸ John Scott and Gordon Marshall. *A Dictionary of Sociology*. (Oxford University Press 2005.) *Oxford Reference Online*. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t88.e1009> (accessed January 29, 2009)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John M. Koller, *The Indian Way*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2006), 19.

¹¹ Ibid., 19-21.

¹² A. L. Herman, *A Brief Introduction to Hinduism: Religion, Philosophy, and Ways of Liberation* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1991), 49.

¹³ Koller, 24.

hymns are the oldest and the most philosophical of the four *Vedas*.”¹⁴ Most Hindus have concentrated on sacred hymns which showed numerous gods from the *Rig Vedas* for their religious lives.¹⁵ While *Vedas* describe a number of deities including representation of natural phenomena, including storms and fire, the *Upanishads*¹⁶, the philosophical commentaries on the *Vedas*, focus on the ultimate reality, *Brahman*.¹⁷

The popular Hindu story about a tiger cub that grew up among a flock of sheep and discovered his original character shows the main point of the philosophy of the *Upanishads*. *Upanishadic* philosophers claim that the discovery of who one really is amounts to liberation, or *moksah*. The *Upanishads* teach that one’s discovery of one’s real self results in liberation and explain that the union of ‘*Atman*’ and ‘*Brahman*’ leads to *moksha*.¹⁸ Therefore, Hinduism is claimed to be an adventurous journey toward real liberation. The goal of Hinduism is to take one from the unhappiness caused by ignorance of their real self to the awakening of a oneness of that real self by entering into union with the ultimate reality, *Brahman*.

The Foundation of Hindu Beliefs

Hindus claim their ancient religion comes from God’s revelation, and they follow spiritual laws accumulated over the past 5000 years, laws that if obeyed will result in true happiness. The sacred *Vedas* claim the divinity of the soul exists in all religions, and that the soul is pure and omniscient. The *Vedas* claim soul was never born, and will never die. The *Vedas* acknowledge one infinite reality, *Brahman*, who is the essence of the whole world, and the essence

¹⁴ Herman, 51.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Upanishad* means “to sit down near,” and it is often called “the secret teachings” of Hinduism.

¹⁷ Herman, 63.

¹⁸ Ibid., 67.

of all souls. Hindus believe that human beings should find *Brahman* for their real liberation.¹⁹ A human's difficult situation continually reminds him of his desperate need for real liberation. Human beings are tied up with their sufferings, and human sufferings are recited consistently in the *Vedas*.

Primary Hindu tenet is *Karma*, which states one's actions determine one's future suffering or happiness. Another important Hindu tenet is *Reincarnation*, or *Samsara*. This doctrine asserts that men's lives repeat the cycle of birth and death until their own *Karma* has been erased.²⁰ In Hindu belief, men's souls merely transfer to new body upon death. The doctrine of Karma and Reincarnation supports the belief in the Hindu Caste System, which consists of four classes. The top class is composed of the *Brahmins* (priests). The second tier is occupied by the *Ksatriyas* (warriors). At the third level are found the *Vaisyas* (merchants). The bottom caste consists of the *Shudras* (laboring class).²¹ It is believed that the top three classes can attain salvation, but *Shudras* and untouchable people must wait for their next birth for liberation. Once again, the chief goal of Hinduism is to experience true liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of death and rebirth, *samsara*, caused by one's *karma*.²²

Yoga & Liberation from Bondage

According to the philosophy of Hinduism, at the root of human suffering is a deep ignorance of who one really is. That is why the suffering and death caused by one's own *karma* must be repeated ceaselessly until one attains final liberation, *moksha*. For over 4000 years Indian

¹⁹ Vivekananda, *Pathways to Joy: The Master Vivekananda on the Four Yoga Paths to God*. (Makawao, HI: Inner Ocean Publishing, 2006), 8-10.

²⁰ Rick Rood, *Hinduism*, Probe Ministries, <http://www.probe.org/site/c.f0KEIMNsEoG/b.4217707/k.D266/Hinduism.htm> (accessed February 21, 2009).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bhaskarananda, 23-26.

people have strived to develop the best method for achieving *moksha*. In fact, the word *Yoga* is a general term referring to the numerous techniques of obtaining *moksha*. Yoga metaphorically represents liberation from human bondage and suffering.²³ A great many Indian philosophers have been convinced that people are capable of radically transforming their own existence in such a way that suffering may be overcome by joy, and death by immortality.²⁴ Hindu teachers have acknowledged that different paths of Yoga will reach the same goal. Indeed, the renowned Hindu philosopher Vivekananda insists that all religions and spiritual disciplines lead to one and the same goal, and that goal is freedom. He explains, “[e]verything that we perceive around us is struggling toward freedom, from the atom to the human being, from the insentient, lifeless particle of matter to the highest existence on earth, the human soul.”²⁵ Hinduism asserts that all human beings desperately desire *moksha*, i.e. true liberation.

The Image of a Chariot Driver

Yogis, i.e. Yoga teachers, claim the serious practice of Yoga demonstrates a great desire to change one’s destiny. The Hindu idea of obtaining liberation from bondage by controlling the deeper powers of reality is illustrated with the image of a chariot driver.²⁶ *The Katha Upanisad* vividly describes that image:

Know the soul as lord of a chariot,
the body as the chariot.
Know the intuition as the chariot driver,
and the mind as the reins.
The senses, they say, are the horses;

²³ Michael Gleghorn, “Yoga and Christianity: Are They Compatible?” http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4217629/k.15B5/Yoga_and_Christianity_Are_They_Compatible.htm (accessed March 1, 2009).

²⁴ Koller, 165.

²⁵ Vivekananda, 80.

²⁶ Ibid, 164.

the objects of sense the paths.
This associated with the body, the senses and the mind,
the wise call 'the enjoyer.'
Those who do not have understanding,
whose minds are always undisciplined,
their senses are out of control,
like the wild horses of a chariot driver.²⁷

The word *Yoga* is derived from the root *yuj*, and its primary meaning is “the action of harnessing.” This meaning carries with it both controlling and joining.²⁸ The chariot driver image then illustrates the “joining” of the driver with the horses and the chariot as well as the “controlling” of the chariot by the driver’s good judgment. As a good chariot driver can control the tremendous power of the horses to accurately propel the chariot, people need an effective technique and discipline for directing their tremendous spiritual energy at the deepest level of reality.²⁹ It is claimed the techniques of Yoga can be used to entirely transform an individual by connecting his earthly self with the divine reality. Through unity with the *Brahman*, people can control their reality, and escape from the unending cycle of death and rebirth to at last experience the ultimate liberation. Using the analogy of the chariot and driver, Indian mysticism expert John M. Koller describes the mechanics of how Yoga strives to master body and soul:

The body, a lower level of reality, is controlled by the mind, a higher level reality. The mind, in turn, is controlled by a still higher reality, the intelligence, while all of these are controlled by and work for the highest reality, the Self. When the power of the highest level of reality reaches down into the lower levels of reality, disciplining and controlling them, they are transformed by the highest power—even as wild horses are transformed into chariot power by the power and control of a skilled driver.³⁰

²⁷ Sanderson Beck, *Wisdom Bible from Ancient China, India, Greece, the Middle East, and Rome* (Ojai, CA: World Peace Communications, 2002), 1.3.3.-5.

²⁸ Jean Varenne, *Yoga and the Hindu Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 78.

²⁹ Koller, 167.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

So then just as a highly skilled and well-disciplined chariot driver can use the horse's great power to control the chariot for winning battles, Yoga claims human beings can also have victory over the *karma*-induced cycle of death and birth by controlling one's own self completely and uniting with the Divine Reality.

Penetrating the Layers of the Self with Yoga

The *Upanishad* draws the model of the self: The self is a set of four concentric spheres, one inside the other. The innermost sphere is the *atman*, i.e. the "pure self." The pure self is surrounded by three outer layers. These outer layers are called the three *gunas*,³¹ which means "standards."³² Hinduism scholar A. L. Herman introduces the other three *gunas* by citing the *Upanishad*:

- (1) *sattva guna* is the standard or quality of goodness, rightness, purity, light, illumination, knowledge, and wisdom, in a word, brightness; (2) *Rajas guna* is the strand or quality of "inner lusting, attachment, feeling, jealousy, outer lusting, maliciousness, hatred, ... envy, insatiability, ... ambitiousness, ... and gluttony", in a word, action; (3) *Tamas guna* is the strand or quality of "delusion, fear, depression, sleepiness, tiredness, forgetfulness, old age, sorrow, hunger, thirst, anger, heterodoxy, ignorance, ...stupidity..., in a word, inertia."³³

For true liberation, a human being's pure self, *Atman*, must meet with the Divine Reality, *Brahman*. Yoga then attempts to penetrate the several outer layers of one's self until *Atman* is reachable and able to unite with *Brahman*. Author Koller observes that Yoga has always been understood to represent an attempt to manipulate the deeper powers of existence for the sake of transformation, and liberation.³⁴

³¹ According to Vedanta, *guna* is any of the interdependent qualities or energies: *sattva*, *rajas*, or *tamas*. Cf. *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t183.e33619> (accessed February 10, 2009).

³² Herman, 81.

³³ *Ibid.*, qtd. in Maitri, *Upanishad* 1.5.

³⁴ Koller, 170.

Primary Ways of Liberation

Hinduism recognizes four goals of human life. The first human goal is to satisfy the desire for sensual pleasure, particularly through love and sexual desire. This goal is called *kama*. The second goal of life is to obtain worldly possessions, e.g. money. The second goal is known as *artha*. The third goal of life entails the proper observance of religious duties. This goal is known as *dharma*. One who gives himself to *dharma* is said to have abandoned worldly pleasures and success in order to seek the common good. The final goal of life is *moksha*. This is true liberation from the suffering and rebirth of this world and to become one with God—*nirvana*.³⁵ Thus, the ultimate goal of human being is their re-union with God. Hindus called the several methods designed to attain this ultimate goal of life “Yoga.” Hindu philosophy suggests that although the aim is one, the methods of attaining the goal vary according to every person’s true nature. Therefore, Hindus rely on four main ways to achieve liberation.

Karma Yoga is the manner in which people realize their divinity through works and duty. *Bhakti* Yoga is the realization of the divinity through devotion to, and love of, a personal god. *Jnana* Yoga is the realization of our divinity through knowledge. *Raja* Yoga is the realization of the divinity through the control of mind. These four roads lead to the same destination: *Brahman*.³⁶

The Purpose of Yoga in the Sacred Texts

As noted above, Yoga is not simply a system of physical exercise or a means of releasing psychic stress, as so many in the West have come to believe. Raphael, author of the *Essence and*

³⁵ Bhaskarananda, 7.

³⁶ Vivekananda, 8-10.

Purpose of Yoga: The Initiatory Pathways to the Transcendent, insisted that Yoga is not merely a technique for physical health; it is in fact “an ancient path to spiritual growth”.³⁷

The purpose of Yoga is found in its sacred texts. The *Upanishads* are believed to have been written between 800-200 B.C.³⁸ One *Upanishad* said, “Unite the light within you with the light of *Brahman*.”³⁹ The *Bhagavad Gita*, a classic Hindu text believed written between the Fifth Century B.C. and the Second Century A.D.,⁴⁰ used the word “Yoga” in chapter six. *Krishna* declares, “Thus joy supreme comes to the yogi ... who is one with *Brahman*, with God.”⁴¹

Finally, the noted yogi Patanjali divided and classified Yoga into eight different “limbs” in his *Yoga Sutras*. These eight limbs are seen as eight steps from ignorance to enlightenment. The eight limbs are “restraint (*yama*), discipline (*niyama*), physical posture (*asana*), breath control (*pranayama*), withdrawal of the senses (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dharana*), meditation (*dhyana*) and ecstasy (*samadhi*).”⁴² Patanjali called these eight steps *Raja* Yoga, i.e. the royal path to union with *Brahman*. Once again, the ultimate purpose of Yoga is to realize the Ultimate Reality, God.⁴³

³⁷ Raphael, *Essence and Purpose of Yoga: The Initiatory Pathways to the Transcendent* (Shaftesbury, Dorset [England]: Element, 1996), back cover.

³⁸ Upanishad: noun. *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e84986> (accessed February 10, 2009).

³⁹ Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal* (California: A Mentor Book, 1975), 120.

⁴⁰ Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t98.e392> (accessed February 10, 2009).

⁴¹ Juan Mascaró, *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated from the Sanskrit with an introduction by Juan Mascaró (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), 71.

⁴² Patañjali, and Malhotra Ashok Kumar, *An Introduction to Yoga Philosophy: An Annotated Translation of the Yoga Sutras*, Ashgate World Philosophies series (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2001), 37.

⁴³ Vivekananda, 236.

The Methods of Yoga

As noted above, Yoga is a common designation for various methods designed for union with God. Modern Yoga includes traditional classical Yoga as described in the *Bhagavad-Gita*; *Raja* Yoga, systematized by Patanjali; and diverse practical Yogas, including *Hatha* Yoga, which has gained great popularity in the Western world.

Classical Yoga

Because they are mentioned in the venerable *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Karma* Yoga, *Bhakti* Yoga, and *Jnana* Yoga are known as the classical Yogas.

The word *Karma*, derived from the root *kri*, means “action,” or “effect.” In Hinduism, *Karma* is the principle by which a person's actions in this world determine the fate that awaits him or her after death.⁴⁴ This type of Yoga encourages human beings to apply their knowledge of reality to their daily lives. The ultimate goal of *karma* Yoga is direct communion with one's spirit, and this communion is achieved by spiritual discipline.⁴⁵ Yoga expert George Feuerstein has observed that the objective of *karma* Yoga is “inaction in action.” That seeming contradiction refers to one's transcendence of “egoic motivation.”⁴⁶ *Karma* Yoga, therefore, is a system of discipline designed to attain freedom through unselfishness, and good works.⁴⁷ Mahatma Gandhi was modern India's most excellent example of a *karma-yogin* in action. Gandhi worked

⁴⁴ Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardcastle, and Flavia Hodges, "Karma" in *A Dictionary of First Names*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴⁵ Nikhilananda, *Hinduism: Its Meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit*, World Perspectives, v. 17. (New York: Harper, 1958), 89.

⁴⁶ George Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy, and Practice* (Prescott, Ariz: Hohm Press, 1998), 48.

⁴⁷ Vivekananda, 146.

industriously on himself, and for the welfare of the Indian nation.⁴⁸ Gandhi's *karma* Yoga is a classical method whose goal is to meet with the Ultimate Reality, *Brahman*.

Another method is *bhakti* Yoga. Feuerstein explains that the word *bhakti* is derived from the root *bhaj*, and has the meaning of "to share," or "to participate in" and he said "*Bhakti* Yoga is the Yoga of loving self-dedication to, and love-participation in, the divine Person."⁴⁹ *Bhakti* Yoga asserts the most gratifying love is related with God. When a man obtains the love of God, he loves all, and becomes satisfied with everything.⁵⁰ *Bhakti* Yoga has deep historical roots. *Vedic* hymns are invocations to various higher powers in respectful celebration. In these hymns are found the earliest historical roots of *Bhakti* Yoga. *Bhakti* Yoga was originally connected with the gods *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, but also plays an important role in the worship of the goddesses of Hinduism. Feuerstein quotes *Krishna*'s saying: "Bhakti is the alpha and omega of spiritual life."⁵¹ *Bhakti* Yoga then is not only a type of religious devotion, but also a means of achieving liberation.

Originally, the word *jnana* meant "knowledge," particularly as it related to the skills of a warrior or a farmer. However, over the millennia *jnana* has been semantically enlarged to include all types of spiritual knowledge, in particular the knowledge of the best way to approach *Brahman*.⁵² For Hinduism, ignorance is the most significant problem of all, resulting in the distortion of human beings. The best way to leave the misery of the world is to attain spiritual enlightenment, to understand that everything in the world is *maya*, and that human beings are divine. An ancient

⁴⁸ Feuerstein, 49.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 36.

⁵⁰ Nikhilananda, 105.

⁵¹ Feuerstein, 39-40.

⁵² John Bowker, ed., *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t101.e3665> (accessed February 10, 2009).

Indian parable about a tiger cub illustrates the main idea driving *jnana* Yoga.⁵³ The path of *jnana* Yoga, however, is described as “a straight but steep course.”⁵⁴ Six detailed steps, including discernment and renunciation, permit the *jnana* Yoga practitioner to reach liberation. Once again, the ultimate purpose of all classical Yogas is reaching *Brahman*.

Yoga Sutra by Patanjali

Yoga first appears as a system of philosophy sometime between 500 and 200 B.C. Its main ideas are presented in a text called the *Yoga Sutra*, composed by Patanjali. The Yoga of Patanjali represents the climax of a long development of yogic technology.⁵⁵ The *Yoga Sutra* contains four kinds of Yoga: *mantra* Yoga, *laya* Yoga, *hatha* Yoga, and *raja* Yoga. Among these four, the most important yoga is considered to be *raja* Yoga, or “royal Yoga.”⁵⁶

The eight paths of *raja* Yoga are connected to one another. The first two paths, restraint (*yama*) and discipline (*niyama*), are applied to social and personal lives. The next two limbs, physical posture (*asana*) and breath control (*pranayama*) are the most important tools for withdrawing the senses (*pratyahara*) and attaining a perfect state of concentration (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*), necessary for reaching *Samadhi*, or ecstasy.⁵⁷ Through its eight individual disciplines *Raja* Yoga provides the level of intense concentration necessary for realizing union with *Brahman*.

Hatha Yoga is primarily concerned with improving two important aspects of Patanjali’s *raja* Yoga, physical posture (*asana*) and breath control (*pranayama*). Feuerstein and Miller have

⁵³ Vivekananda, 96.

⁵⁴ Swāmī Satprakāśhānanda, *Methods of knowledge* (London: Allen&Unwin, 1965), 204.

⁵⁵ Ashok Kumar Malhotra, 17.

⁵⁶ Feuerstein, 28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 248-52.

observed that *asana* and *pranayama* are much more than strenuous physical exercises.⁵⁸ As will be explained in greater detail below, *Hatha* Yoga has been specifically designed to achieve union with *Brahman* through the awakening of *Kundalini*, the Hindu goddess having a serpent power.⁵⁹ Western *hatha* Yoga practitioners believe that *hatha* Yoga is religiously neutral, and that it is merely an excellent technique for reducing physical and emotional stress. *Hatha* Yoga, however, has been called “the ladder to *Raja* Yoga” and without doubt shares the same spiritual goals and purposes of *Raja* Yoga.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Georg Feuerstein and Jeanine Miller, *Yoga and Beyond; Essays in Indian Philosophy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 27.

⁵⁹ Ernest Valea, “Possible difficulties in Yoga as a spiritual path towards transcendence,” <http://www.comparativereligion.com/Yoga.html> (accessed February 1, 2009).

⁶⁰ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*. In defense of the faith series, 1. (Eugene, Or: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 603.

CHAPTER TWO

YOGA COMES TO THE WESTERN WORLD

In the previous chapter it was observed that Yoga is not a mere physical and emotional exercise but a religious practice designed to achieve true liberation through personal union with *Brahman*. The onset of Postmodernity coincided with Yoga's migration from the East to the industrialized West. After two world wars many Westerners became disillusioned with Western modernism. Some of them looked to Eastern mysticism as an alternative, including Hindu Yoga practices. The practice of various Yogas would soon spread rapidly and widely throughout Western society. That is because ever since the 1960s the West has grown increasingly receptive to numerous Hindu ideas and practices, including Yoga, meditation, and other mystic ways. Indian philosophy, formerly of little concern to the Western world, has today become the center of attraction of the New Age movement.⁶¹

In recent decades Hindu gurus from the East such as Maharishi, Yogananda, Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi have exerted major influences on Western philosophy, religion, and politics. In January 1979 the largest missionary organization in the world, India's Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), sponsored the second "World Congress on Hinduism" in Allahabad, India.⁶² At this conference one speaker boasted, "Our mission in the West has been crowned with fantastic success. Hinduism is becoming the dominant world religion, and the end of Christianity has come near."⁶³

This chapter will review some major inroads Eastern Yoga has made into mainstream Western society by examining some of the most influential Hindu yogis of modern times. Chapter

⁶¹ Palani Sivasiva, "An Open Letter to Evangelicals," *Hinduismtoday.com*, January 1991, <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/1991/01/1991-01-06.shtml> (accessed March 5, 2009).

⁶² Dave Hunt, *Yoga and the Body of Christ* (OR: Berean Call, 2006), 12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13.

two will also examine aspects of Hindu philosophy that, like religious Pluralism generally, increased greatly in popularity during the Postmodern era.

The Influence of Popular Hindu Yogis

Mohandas Gandhi

Mahatma (“great soul”) Gandhi, born in India’s Western region, is surely the best known Indian in the Western world. Gandhi studied law in London and personally experienced hateful racial prejudice in South Africa for nearly 20 years. During this time Gandhi developed his peculiar philosophy of nonviolent disobedience: *satyagraha*.⁶⁴ George Feuerstein believes Gandhi was modern India’s most superb *karma* yogi, observing that Gandhi forfeited his life in an effort to achieve the lofty ideals of *karma* Yoga.⁶⁵ Herman insisted Gandhi’s civil disobedience movement united *bahkti* Yoga, i.e. the way of loving devotion to God, with attitudes committed to nonviolence and love. Gandhi’s nonviolent philosophy had a major impact on the Western world, especially in the case of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who led the civil rights movement for African-Americans during the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁶ King cited Gandhi’s speeches about *ahimsa* as an influence on his decision to adopt strategies of nonviolent resistance to racial injustice.⁶⁷ Gandhi’s insistence on the equality of all religions and ethnic groups has served as a model for methods of peaceful non-violence movements in many countries.⁶⁸ Mahatma Gandhi, who was trained in *bakti* and *karma* Yoga, exerted a major influence on Indian life and philosophy, an influence that is still felt today.

⁶⁴ Herman, 2.

⁶⁵ Feuerstein, 49.

⁶⁶ Herman, 7.

⁶⁷ Gail M. Harley, *Hindu and Sikh Faiths in America*, Faith in America (New York: Facts On File, 2003), 62.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 44.

Vivekananda

The best known of the Hindu missionaries was Swami Vivekananda, who in 1893 traveled to the “World’s Parliament of Religions,” a conference that was held at the Chicago World’s Fair. Vivekananda began his address to that conference with the words, “Sisters and Brothers of America.” After two minutes of thunderous applause from the audience, Vivekananda represented the spirit of India and Hinduism by reading an excerpt from the *Bhagavad Gita*:⁶⁹

As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee!” “Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths that in the end lead to Me.”⁷⁰

American newspapers hailed Vivekananda as the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. They lauded him as “the spiritual wisdom of the East,” and “the alternative to the materialism of the West.”⁷¹ After the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda went on a lecturing tour through several cities and introduced a large number of Westerners to his particular brand of Hinduism.⁷² Vivekananda taught the essence of *Vedanta*: the human soul is pure and omniscient; it was never born, and will never die. There is no sin; *Vedanta* recognizes only ignorance. The human soul is immortal; it is subject to the great law of spiritual evolution until it reaches perfection, i.e. the union with *Brahman*. The ultimate goal for all of humanity is to achieve “oneness with God.” There are various Yogas, but all lead to the same center, God.⁷³

⁶⁹ Vivekananda, 276.

⁷⁰ Vivekananda and Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works, Including the Chicago Addresses*, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1953), 183.

⁷¹ Vivekananda, *Pathways to Joy*, 276.

⁷² Gurinder Singh Mann, Paul David Numrich, and Raymond Brady Williams, *Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America*. Religion in American life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 55.

⁷³ Vivekananda, 65.

In time the spirit of Vivekananda's religious musings would bond easily with the New Age movement, and help continue the spread of religious pluralism throughout the postmodern Western world.

The Influence of Hindu Culture

Indian Music

Hinduism has had a major impact on American music, especially since the 1960's. Ravi Shankar, a popular Hindu singer and sitarist,⁷⁴ has been an important Eastern influence on modern Western music. The rhythm and melody of Shankar's music was rooted in a peculiarly Hindu culture. The Hindu *Bhajan*, a devotional song to a God, has been widely performed by Ravi Shankar. Shankar incorporated several ancient Hindu chants into modern American music⁷⁵, and Harley recalls "the Beatles were among the many famous musicians who studied with, were inspired by, and performed with Shankar."⁷⁶

In 1967 the Beatles journeyed to Rishnekes, India, home of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of Transcendental Meditation (TM). The Beatles' public support of TM introduced millions of their fans to Hindu Yoga. Beatle George Harrison blended Eastern religion and rhythms with traditional Western thought in his 1971 hit song, *My Sweet Lord*. Harrison successfully created a type of spiritual fusion by combining Eastern deities like *Krishna* with Christian terms like "Lord" and "God." The Beatles' musical syncretism helped Eastern mysticism, especially Yoga, to penetrate much deeper into Western culture.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ The *sitar* is a stringed Indian musical instrument.

⁷⁵ Harley, 63

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Matrisciana, *Out of India*, 180-81.

New Age Movies

India produces more movies than any other country in the world. “Bollywood,” the informal name given the center of the Indian film industry, produces numerous movies rooted in ancient Indian epics, as well as narratives and musical films that feature Indian-style song and dance. For several decades Bollywood movies have exerted great influences on American movies, particularly in the musical and historical genres. For example, in the mega-hit movie *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, Harrison Ford fought with the ancient *Kali*, a Hindu goddess who protects her followers and destroys opposing spiritual forces.⁷⁸ In the original *Star Wars*, when protagonist Luke Skywalker’s spacecraft crashes into a swamp and gets into serious trouble, it is a strange dwarf named Yoda that helps the spacecraft get out of the swamp through the power of his mind. Yoda also recommends the power of meditation to Luke. “Yoda,” almost certainly derived from “Yoga,” demonstrated that the way to access the impersonal “force” was by Yoga meditation.⁷⁹

Numerous Western movies and television series including *Harry Potter*, *Star Trek*, *Power Rangers*, *Yu-Gi-Oh*, and *Avatar*, are deeply rooted in Hinduism. The heroes of these stories often deploy their tremendous mental and spiritual powers to help the weak and demolish the wicked forces who threaten the peace of whole world.⁸⁰

Indian *tantric* movies have also been attracting large Western audiences. These films harmonize erotic dance and sensual music in order to produce sexual desire in viewers, mainly by emphasizing the beauty and power of sex. Additionally, Indian musical films are becoming increasingly popular to postmodern Western audiences.

⁷⁸ Harley, 64.

⁷⁹ Hunt, 62.

⁸⁰ Ibid.,64.

Hippies

Some credit the great popularity of Eastern mysticism in Twentieth Century American culture for launching the so-called “Hippie Movement.” The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines a hippie as “a person of unconventional appearance, typically having long hair and wearing beads, associated with a subculture involving a rejection of conventional values and the taking of hallucinogenic drugs.”⁸¹ Hippies held countercultural values and warmly embraced the “Sexual Revolution” of the 1960s. The Sexual Revolution hoped to replace the traditional biblical view of man, woman, and marriage by normalizing and glorifying homosexuality, nudity, sacramental sex, free sex, and sex with drugs.⁸² The Hippies discovered there were striking similarities between the altered states of consciousness attained by the practice of Yoga and those attained by drug use. Interestingly, throughout the tradition of Hinduism people have used the hallucinogen *Soma* to expand their own consciousness and to experience a similar *Samadhi* for reaching “true liberation,” or *moksha*.⁸³

Hippies found a philosophical foundation to support their radical view of human sexuality in Hinduism’s *tantra* Yoga. *Tantric* yogi Chandi Devi insists that *tantra* Yoga and *tantric* sex produce *tantric* orgasms that guarantee both greater health and intimacy.⁸⁴ Western Hippies were notorious for rejecting their society’s traditional values. They opposed nuclear weapons and all wars, hated animal food (most were vegetarians), enjoyed psychedelic rock music, and had a

⁸¹ Erin McKean, ed., “*The New Oxford American Dictionary, 2nd ed.*,” *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t183.e35885> (Accessed March 5, 2009).

⁸² Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 54-55.

⁸³ Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 193.

⁸⁴ Harry Oldmeadow, “Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions,” *Library of Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 260.

burning desire to attain a state of true freedom. The open sex and hallucinogenic drug abuse practiced by Hippies mimicked principles and applications of certain strands of Hinduism, and in so doing helped to spread many strange new ideas deeper into Western culture.⁸⁵

Hare Krishna

The Hare Krishna movement in the United States was founded in 1965 by Bhaktinedanta Swami Prabhupad.⁸⁶ During the 1970s many young Caucasian Americans were influenced by Indian immigrants dressed in Hindu garb, particularly those who were dancing and chanting praises to the Hindu god *Krishna*. These Krishnas recited the ecstatic chanting of the divine names of God via the *mahamantra*, i.e. the “greatest mantra for deliverance:”⁸⁷

“Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare, ...”⁸⁸

Many of these young Americans would convert and practice Krishna devotions, most becoming members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). ISKCON became popular during a turbulent period of American history, an era when many young people were rebelling against common beliefs and practices.⁸⁹ ISKCON established community centers and recruited new followers from all over the world. Hare Krishnas devoted themselves into community work and serving the poor and also offered their colorful festival to the public. Timothy Miller observed “[t]he Hare Krishna movement rejected all intoxicants, nearly all sex, rock and roll and other Western music, and all kinds of activities not deemed properly

⁸⁵ Ibid.,260-64.

⁸⁶ Miller, 94.

⁸⁷ Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand, *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 14.

⁸⁸ The word “hare” means “praise.” “Krishna” and “Rama” are names of Hindu gods.

⁸⁹ Mann et al, 56.

transcendental.”⁹⁰ During the 1970s the Hare Krishnas occupied a prominent position in American Hindu life.

Transcendental Meditation

A number of Yoga, meditation, and holistic health programs claim to be irreligious but do in fact have their foundation in historical Hinduism.⁹¹ The most successful and powerful method among them is called Transcendental Meditation (TM).⁹²

In 1958 Maharishi Mahesh yogi founded the “Spiritual Regeneration Movement” in India. The following year he came to America and set up his organization there.⁹³ Many famous entertainers, including the Beach Boys and the Beatles, were attracted to TM’s form of Yoga. TM was quickly accepted in America as a program of stress reduction and has been taught in colleges, public schools, prisons, military installations, and many businesses.⁹⁴ TM is a form of meditation by which a person repeats a word called a *mantra* twenty minutes at a time, twice daily. TM promises to improve one’s conduct while helping one to become more aware of their real nature. The ultimate goal is to escape the reincarnation cycle and reach “real liberation.” The Maharishi insisted TM was pure science, not a religious practice, even though TM is designed to help people realize they are divine. The purpose of real liberation is to be absorbed into the Impersonal being, *Brahman*.⁹⁵ TM is probably the best example of Hinduism’s influence in the Western world among popular entertainers and followers of New Age movements.

⁹⁰ Miller, 95.

⁹¹ Mann et al, 58.

⁹² Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions / Josh McDowell & Don Stewart* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1983), 80.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Mann et al, Ibid.

⁹⁵ McDowell and Stewart, 81.

The Practical Teachings of Yoga in the Western World

Yoga for Health

As noted above, Yoga has made deep inroads into several areas of popular Western culture. Researcher Suzanne Scholz says there are an estimated three million Western practitioners of *hatha* Yoga today.⁹⁶ Many have learned *hatha* Yoga in order to acquire another “stress management” tool to help them with their busy lives.⁹⁷ The word *hatha* come from the words *ha* and *tha*, meaning “sun” and “moon” respectively. *Hatha* Yoga therefore emphasizes the balance of the energy illustrated by the expression and conservation of energy by the “sun” and “moon”.⁹⁸ Therefore, *Hatha* yoga attempts to develop the balance of enemy in the body.⁹⁹ Dr. Norman Shealy, the American Holistic Medical Association, supports *hatha* Yoga as the best method of medical treatment.¹⁰⁰ Most Western physician-practitioners of Yoga believe the chief value of Yoga is in the prevention of illness.

Many Americans are pursuing spiritual enlightenment as well as physical and mental health, so-called “therapeutic” Yoga.

The aim of therapeutic Yoga is to maintain healthy minds and healthy bodies, but its practices are increasingly being used to produce cures, or alleviation of disease symptoms. Yoga works on the premise that most illness is caused by wrong posture, wrong diet, and wrong mental attitudes, imbalances which are under the control of the student himself. Yoga is claimed to be a philosophy embracing every aspect of human life, spiritual,

⁹⁶Susanne Scholz, "Bible and Yoga: Toward an Esoteric Reading of Biblical Literature," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 25 (2005), 135, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=18011210&site=ehost-live> (accessed March 20, 2009).

⁹⁷ Hunt, 66.

⁹⁸ Nancy Roth, *An Invitation to Christian Yoga* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2001), 6-7.

⁹⁹ Paul Dukes, *Yoga for the Western World* (Sydney, Australia: Students of Western Yoga, 1958), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Caroline M. Myss and C. Norman Shealy, *The Creation of Health: The Emotional, Psychological, and Spiritual Responses That Promote Health and Healing* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 58.

emotional, mental and physical. It did not set out to be a therapy, but it is being used as such today. Yoga has become a system of self-improvement, or “conscious evolution.”¹⁰¹

Therapeutic Yoga has the same root and purpose as *hatha* Yoga. The ultimate goals of therapeutic and *hatha* Yoga, therefore, are not merely to maintain body fitness and mental health. The final end of these two popular Yoga techniques is to access God (*Brahman*) by releasing the hidden potential of the human body and mind. *Hatha* Yoga is called “force Yoga” or “Yoga of the force,” and this force comes from serpent power: *Kundalini*.¹⁰²

In Hindu mythology and occult anatomy the serpent goddess *Kundalini* rests at the base of the spine.¹⁰³ She represents the female half of the divine division in man. When she is aroused by Yoga practice she uncoils and travels up the spine toward her lover, *Shiva*. Traveling the spine through psychic centers called *chakras*, *Kundalini* reaches the top *chakra* to merge with Shiva and there receive divine enlightenment through the union with *Brahman*.¹⁰⁴ The *Kundalini* experience is not restricted to *hatha* Yoga practice. Hans Rieker said, “Kundalini is the mainstay of all Yoga practices.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, all Yoga is ultimately *Kundalini* Yoga, and is meaningless without it.

Yoga for the Mind

The Yoga technique for enhancing physical power is closely connected to *Kundalini* power, and similarly aims for a union with *Brahman*. The first chapter observed that Yoga’s purpose of controlling of the flesh is to control the soul through the managing of the mind. *Hatha* Yoga, consequently, uses physical training and mind concentration for the purpose of obtaining

¹⁰¹ Ann Hill, *A Visual Encyclopedia of Unconventional Medicine* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), 221.

¹⁰² Feuerstein, 328.

¹⁰³ John George Woodroffe, Pūrṇānanda, and Kālīcaraṇa, *The Serpent Power; Being the Ṣaṭ-Cakra-Nirūpana and Paḍuka-Pañcaka: Two Works on Laya-Yoga* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Gopi Krishna, *The Awakening of Kundalini* (New York: Dutton, 1975), 13.

¹⁰⁵ Swami Svātmārāma, and Hans Ulrich Rieker, *The Yoga of Light: Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (Los Angeles: Dawn House Press, 1973), 101.

true spirituality. Several forms of Yoga practiced by Westerners employ meditation to lead them to a union with Brahman. Usharbudh Arya categorizes Western Yoga into Hollywood Yoga, Harvard Yoga, Himalayan Yoga, and Cultic Yoga. The author said that “Hollywood Yoga is suggested to those who want to be beauty, Harvard Yoga is for study, Cultic Yoga for religious enlightenment, and Himalayan Yoga is the true and authentic Yoga.”¹⁰⁶ Researcher Susanne Scholz said yoga practitioners are described as typically under forty, white middle class, educated woman who are spiritually focused.”¹⁰⁷

Most Westerners prefer to regard Yoga as a stress management technique as opposed to a way of salvation.¹⁰⁸ They view Westernized Yoga as an excellent method for maintaining physical health and promoting character. Furthermore, Western Yoga instructors often claim that although Yoga is an Indian tradition and more or less based on Hindu philosophy, it does not necessarily belong to any particular region or religious tradition.¹⁰⁹ These teachers mainly provide instruction in the proper Yoga postures and breathing techniques without ever explaining any concepts of Hindu religious belief.¹¹⁰

Another form of Yoga that has invaded the Western world in recent decades appropriates some of its ideas from Christianity. In his book *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of the Gospels*, Yogananda, another famous Hindu yogi, attempts to explain Jesus to another Hindu yogi. Yogananda is careful to discriminate between the names “Jesus” and “Christ,”

¹⁰⁶ Malhotra, 15-16.

¹⁰⁷ Suzanne Scholz, "Bible and Yoga", 139, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=18011210&site=ehost-live> (accessed April 10, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ Enroth, 43.

¹⁰⁹ Hunt, 10.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Ryan, *Prayer of Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga As Christian Spiritual Practice* (New York: Paulist, 1995),132.

explaining that Jesus was his given name and Christ was his honorific title.¹¹¹ Yogananda insisted that Jesus was called “the son of God” due to the oneness he achieved with God through the deepest meditation.¹¹² Yogananda claims Jesus’ miracles were accomplished with the divine power through his ecstasy experiences.¹¹³ Regarding Yoga as a type of mind science, Yogananda insisted that anyone can similarly reach the highest spiritual status by following his manual.¹¹⁴

Yoga as a Science

Increasingly, many in the Western world are classifying Yoga as a science. Just as modern science has its hypotheses to verify and the field of nature to study and test, man’s interior world of consciousness is similarly considered a field of scientific inquiry.¹¹⁵ Patanjali, India’s foremost ancient exponent of *raja* Yoga, has outlined eight steps for ascension to God. *Raja* Yoga is claimed to be the inner science for achieving the actual realization of God. For achieving true liberation from human limitations, the practitioners of *raja* Yoga must sit still in the correct meditation posture and then start to breathe deeply. It is claimed disciplined physical and mental Yoga practice as prescribed by these learned gurus can lead practitioners to reach oneness with the original source of consciousness.¹¹⁶ This type of Yoga has attracted more scientifically-minded Westerners because of its de-emphasis of the mystic.

The appeal of Hinduism to Western culture, especially Yoga practice, is not difficult to understand given the fact that Hinduism also embraces certain evolutionary ideas. Pastor Rick

¹¹¹ Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of the Gospels* (Los Angeles, Calif: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007), 5.

¹¹² Ibid., 19.

¹¹³ Ibid., 55.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹¹⁵ Jaidev, *Christianity and Yoga: A Meeting of Mystic Paths* (London: Arkana, 1989), 61.

¹¹⁶ Yogananda, 104-6.

Rood observes, “[a]s modern science emphasizes our physical evolution, so Hinduism emphasizes our spiritual evolution. As much of modern psychology emphasizes the basic goodness and unlimited potential of human nature, so Hinduism emphasizes man’s essential divinity.”¹¹⁷ Hindus claim that it takes many lifetimes of physical, mental, and spiritual evolution to resolve and escape from all of one’s karmic entanglements. Through the evolution of souls, human beings whose souls have been purified may at last enter into the stage of uniting with the Impersonal power (*Brahman*).

The particular species of Hinduism that includes “the evolution of souls” and “the scientific stages” is known as *kundalini* Yoga.¹¹⁸ Therefore, *kundalini* Yoga is said to be the primary purpose of all Yogas, meaning that all genuine Yogas have at least some aspects of *kundalini* Yoga. Other concepts distinctive to *kundalini* Yoga will be surveyed in greater detail in the last chapter.

The Most Popular Yogas in America

***Iyengar* Yoga**

B.K.S. Iyengar’s famous book, *Light on Yoga*, a comprehensive examination and description of the philosophy and practice of Yoga, has been called “the bible of modern Yoga.” *Light on Yoga* contains 600 photographs that provide detailed descriptions and illustrations of nearly every Yoga posture and breathing technique.¹¹⁹ The primary purpose of the book is to make the *asanas* (postures) and *pranayamas* (breathing disciplines) of Yoga easily accessible to the postmodern world.¹²⁰ Iyengar challenged Westerners to pursue higher spiritual goals, to search for

¹¹⁷ Rood, *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Hunt, 73.

¹¹⁹ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga: Yoga Dipika* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), front page.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

God everywhere in the all world as Universal truth. Iyengar claimed the ancient sages who relied on mythology and rudimentary spiritual laws were capable of producing more intelligent writings and artistic works than moderns.¹²¹

Iyengar declared “Yoga is a science which liberates one’s mind from its bondage to the body and leads it towards the soul. When the mind reaches and merges with the soul, the soul is freed and remains thereafter in peace and beatitude.”¹²² Regarding Yoga as an inner science, Iyengar insisted that if a man can control his breath, he can control his mind, and if he can control his mind, he can attain the very peak of meditation, *samadhi*. Iyengar explained that at *samadhi* man experiences the greatest pleasure and happiness because his body and senses are asleep while his mind is totally awake.¹²³

A derivative of *hatha* Yoga, *Iyengar* Yoga focuses on the structural alignment of the physical body through the development of *asanas*. The special method of *Iyengar* Yoga involves the use of props such as belts and blocks to assist in attaining the correct *asanas*. *Iyengar* Yoga has the dual focus of physical and mental benefits. Through the practice of a complex system of *asanas*, *Iyengar* Yoga seeks to unite the body, mind, and spirit for the overall health and well-being of people living in a modern Western society.¹²⁴

Integral Yoga

Sri Swami Satchidananda, the founder of *integral* Yoga, explains the goals of the daughter species of Yoga he created:

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² B. K. S. Iyengar, and Daniel Rivers-Moore, *The Tree of Yoga: Yoga Vrksa* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), 5.

¹²³ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, 52.

¹²⁴ B. K. S. Iyengar, “Frequently asked questions (FAQs) about Iyengar Yoga,” <http://www.bksiyengar.com/modules/FAQ/faq.htm> (accessed March 29, 2009).

"The goal of Integral Yoga, and the birthright of every individual, is to realize the spiritual unity behind all the diversities in the entire creation and to live harmoniously as members of one universal family. This goal is achieved by maintaining our natural condition of a body of optimum health and strength, senses under total control, a mind well-disciplined, clear and calm, an intellect as sharp as a razor, a will as strong and pliable as steel, a heart full of unconditional love and compassion, an ego as pure as a crystal, and a life filled with Supreme Peace and Joy."¹²⁵

Integral Yoga is considered a synthesis of the various branches of Yoga. It is purported to be a scientific system for the harmonious development of every aspect of the individual. The base camp of *integral Yoga*, Yogaville, located in Buckingham, Virginia prepares various programs for various comers. Swami Satchidananda summarizes each of the following Yoga branches and says *integral Yoga* is the synthetic Yoga:

1. *Hatha Yoga*. Focuses on the physical aspects through *asanas* (postures), *pranayama* (breath control), *mudras*, *kriyas*, yogic diet, and deep relaxation.
2. *Raja Yoga*. Balance and control of the mind through ethical practices, concentration and meditation;
3. *Bhakti Yoga*. The path of devotion, by constant love, thought, and service of the Divine. *Bhakti Yoga* can be practiced by everyone. All that is needed is faith and constant remembrance of God.
4. *Karma Yoga*. The path of action and selfless service. Serving without attachment to the results of the action.
5. *Jnana Yoga*. The intellectual approach. Through the knowledge of what really exists, that is, what is not changeable, one who engages in the Path of Wisdom realizes Oneness with the entire Universe.
6. *Japa Yoga*. *Japa* means repetition of a *mantra*, i.e. a sound structure of one or more syllables, especially one that represents a particular aspect of the Divine Vibration.¹²⁶

In his 1978 book *To Know Yourself*, Swami Satchidananda asserted that all Yoga practices deal with the mind, and by using and training the mind, man can achieve a happy, healthy, harmonious, and successful life which in the end must lead to "final liberation."¹²⁷ Satchidananda

¹²⁵ Sri Swami Satchidananda, "What is Integral Yoga?" <http://www.yogaville.org/integral-yoga/what-is-integral-yoga/?what-is-integral-yoga> (accessed March 27, 2009).

¹²⁶ "The Six Branches of Yoga," http://www.anastasiagilliam.com/integral_hatha_yoga (accessed March 27, 2009).

¹²⁷ Satchidananda, and Philip Mandelkorn, *To Know Your Self: The Essential Teachings of Swami Satchidananda* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1978), 249.

insisted all Yogas that contain eternal truths should, as old wine, be poured into new bottles by renewing the mind.¹²⁸

Satchidananda believes Westerners living in today's postmodern society hunger for a new type of spirituality, a spirituality that Hindu Yoga philosophy is well-equipped to provide.

Satchidananda promises higher happiness may be achieved through developing the God who is still in all men, this God existing in the form of peace and joy.¹²⁹ Satchidananda's *integral* Yoga introduced a deep spirituality to Westerners dissatisfied with a culture obsessed with all things material and technological, Westerners who have been hungering for a deeper meaning to their lives.

The next chapter will survey the growing influence various forms of Yoga practice have had on the Christian West, especially on American Christianity and its churches.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 250.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

YOGA IN AMERICAN CHURCHES

During the Twentieth Century Eastern Yoga successfully planted roots in the Western world, both philosophically and practically. Caryl Matrisciana, the author of *Out of India*, points out that Classic Hinduism was not as mission-minded as evangelical Christianity, but during centuries of British rule learned several effective missionary strategies from British missionaries.¹³⁰ As a result, by the beginning of the Twenty-first Century there were over 70,000 Yoga instructors active in more than 20,000 locations across America, including business centers, hospitals, and education facilities, spreading Eastern mysticism throughout the entire country.¹³¹

Yoga has pervaded stressful Western society, appealing to pregnant women, business men, students, and senior citizens, enhancing their concentration and self-confidence. Thus, many Fortune 500 companies including Nike, HBO, Forbes, Apple, and scores of others offer Yoga meditation classes as part of their employee benefits. Hospitals are also providing Yoga programs to their patients as an alternative medical therapy for rapid recovery. Moreover, YMCAs and YWCAs offer Hatha Yoga classes for physical education. Mass media, Internet outlet malls, and portal web sites are spewing forth Yoga products, programs, and sources.¹³²

Christians are also interested in their mental, physical, and spiritual health. That is why an unlikely new form of religious syncretism has gained a secure bridgehead in America, and many other parts of the Western world: so-called “Christian Yoga.” The popularity of Christian Yoga continues to increase in modern America. For this reason the focus of this chapter will be on Christian Yoga’s origins, methods, applications, and implications.

¹³⁰Matrisciana, 190.

¹³¹ Ibid., 191.

¹³² Ibid., 192.

Christian Yoga Basics

Origins

Many Westerners have tried to separate the several exercises associated with Yoga from the practice of Classic Hinduism. Pragmatists concerned mainly with the earthly benefits obtainable from the practice of Yoga believe that it can be neatly divorced from its Eastern spiritual aspects either ignoring or redefining them. Contra the pragmatists, author David Fetcho insists “[p]hysical Yoga, according to its classical definitions, is inherently and functionally incapable of being separated from Eastern religious meta-physics.”¹³³ Fetcho’s warnings notwithstanding, many Western churches have taken the side of the pragmatists, believing the practice of Yoga can be sufficiently Christianized. Despite the deep misgivings of many within these Western churches, the practice of Yoga has become increasingly acceptable in many, defended by its advocates as nothing more than a spiritually-based, aerobic workout. Many of these churches are merging Yoga postures and breathing techniques with contemplative prayer, and Christian music.¹³⁴

According to Caryl Matrisciana, Christian Yoga apologist Thomas Keating attempts to make Yoga more Christian-friendly by renaming some exotic-sounding Eastern meditation techniques as “centering,” “contemplative prayer,” and “transformed into Christ.”¹³⁵ Susan Bordenkircher, another famous Christian Yoga instructor, has also claimed that Christians may use Yoga practice to improve their physical and spiritual well-being—without ascribing to any

¹³³ David Fetcho, *Hatha Yoga: Simply Physical Exercise?* (Berkeley, CA: Spiritual Counterfeits Project, 1982), 2.

¹³⁴ Matrisciana, 182.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

historically Eastern worldviews. Bordenkircher observes that the worship of the sun by some religions does not prevent Christians from enjoying the sunshine God provides.¹³⁶

Similarly positive attitudes toward Yoga and Eastern mysticism in many American churches has led to a growing acceptance of what is now known as “Christian Yoga.” Unconcerned with the potential hybridization of their faith, these churches are instead crediting Yoga for an increase in their members’ physical and spiritual health, and for providing an unexpected opportunity for evangelism in their communities.¹³⁷

The Meaning of Christian Yoga

“Christianized” Yoga, undeniably deeply-rooted in Eastern mysticism, is spreading rapidly throughout North American churches. This phenomenon has caused conservative theologians to ask themselves, “How have so many popular ‘Christian yogis’ recreated Yoga so as to make it attractive to so many Western churches?”

Nancy Roth, an assistant priest at Christ Episcopal Church in Oberlin, Ohio, attempted to describe “an incarnated Yoga theology” in her 2001 book *An Invitation to Christian Yoga*. Syncretist Roth said “[i]t did not matter that we had chanted ‘OM’ or that the exercises had Hindu names. My awareness of my own ‘incarnated-ness’ drew me closer to the Incarnate One.”¹³⁸ Roth went on to explain that “[t]he One I encountered, as I lay on the gym floor with my body relaxed and my mind and spirit attentive, was the God I knew in Christ Jesus.”¹³⁹ Like many Christian yogis, Roth is primarily concerned with Yoga’s practical effects, and is not troubled by Yoga’s

¹³⁶ Susan Bordenkircher, *Yoga for Christians*, 4.

¹³⁷ Matrisciana, 182.

¹³⁸ Roth, 1.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

alien historical and philosophical foundation. She recommends Christian Yoga to American churches as an excellent way for encountering and developing a strong relationship with God.

In *An Invitation to Christian Yoga*, Nancy Roth presents one particular way of opening oneself to the wholeness and holiness that is found in *Hatha* Yoga, a species of Yoga that developed from an ancient Hindu tradition. When practiced within a Christian context, *Hatha* Yoga is called “Christian Yoga.” For Hindus, the various disciplines of Yoga help to unite mind and body; the human being and the divine; the inner self and the outer world. These disciplines involve several different practices and goals: “devotion (*Bhakti* Yoga), knowledge (*Jnana* Yoga), action (*Karma* Yoga), inner concentration, and ‘royal way’ (*Raja* Yoga).”¹⁴⁰ According to Nancy Roth, the words for “health” and “holiness” have the same root and the doctrine of Incarnation means the unity of physical health and spiritual holiness in human body. She claims that “Hatha yoga also becomes a means of growing in the centeredness that contributes to holy living, as we unite our prayer with our bodies and our bodies with our prayer.”¹⁴¹

Brooke Boon has introduced what she calls “Holy Yoga” to the Christian community. She regards Holy Yoga as a prayer of the body. Boon is the founder of “Holy Yoga Ministries,” and an active Christian Yoga instructor who regularly travels all across America. Boon teaches that the practice of Holy Yoga enables Christians to pursue the union of their bodies and minds with God’s Holy Spirit, who dwells within them. Boon observes that there are three main components of Yoga: “physical postures, breathing, and meditation.” Boon believes humans are integrated beings in their “thoughts, feelings, bodily experiences, and spiritual longings.” She insists that Christians

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

must be “well-balanced” in their bodies, minds, and spirits, and that the practice of Holy Yoga will enable them to serve Jesus Christ with their entire beings.¹⁴²

In response to her conservative critics, Boon claims there is in fact a solid biblical foundation for the practice of Holy Yoga. She reminds her students that Jesus prayed for His disciples and all believers to be unified in each other, and in Him (Jn 17:20-14). Boon also cites the Apostle Paul, who urged church members repeatedly to be unified in the body of Christ. Boon says Paul knew that love is the virtue that binds everyone together in perfect unity (Col 3:14), and that Christians must “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace because there is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism” (Eph 4:3-6). She maintains that the idea of unity in Christ is a beautiful and biblical design for His people, and that this idea is entirely compatible with Holy Yoga.¹⁴³

The physical aspects of *Hatha* Yoga are familiar to many Christians. Like most Yogas, *Hatha* Yoga also incorporates breathing, relaxation, and meditation. Holy Yoga is also a derivative of *Bhakti* Yoga, the Yoga of devotion. The goal of *Bhakti* Yoga is to bond with the Supreme Being through acts of devotion. Boon explains that *Bhakti* Yoga is an excellent method of getting in touch with and being immersed in the Holy Spirit. Boon’s primary strategy for making Yoga holy involves merging the postures of *Hatha* Yoga with the spiritual goals of *Bhakti* Yoga.¹⁴⁴

Susan Bordenkircher, a yogi famous for her Christian Yoga DVD, insists Christ-centered Yoga is indeed for Christians. She envisions a close parallel between today’s Yoga and yesterday’s rock music, observing that not long ago most churches rejected rock music as evil, and taboo. But contemporary Christian music has been greatly influenced by rock music styles, and this music has

¹⁴² Brooke Boon, *Holy Yoga: Exercise for the Christian Body and Soul* (New York: FaithWords, 2007), 6.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

been effective in helping church members emotionally and spiritually. Bordenkircher believes the most important thing is the intent of the user. She insists that like fast-paced music, Yoga is also God’s blessing and gift—so long as Christians use Yoga for glorifying God, sharing the love of God, and for becoming more intimate with Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁵

According to Bordenkircher, Yoga, which began in India and was an important part of Hinduism, is not inherently Hindu. On the contrary, Bordenkircher claims Yoga is a “common grace,” specially designed for good physical and spiritual health. She explains that Yoga originated from the study of nature, particularly the study of the behavior and breathing patterns of certain animals. Some of these observations were later tested on the human body, and found to be beneficial to health. Postures and breathing techniques observed in nature were found to aid in human concentration, and improved concentration enabled human beings to become connected to their divine Maker. Bordenkircher claims Yoga occupies a religiously neutral position, i.e. any religious person can make use of Yoga techniques to become much closer to their own god. Bordenkircher says Christians can also use Yoga for a profound meeting with God, i.e. they can create or restore an intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ. After employing a novel interpretation of Ephesians 3:17,¹⁴⁶ Bordenkircher insists that Yoga is another gift of God through Jesus Christ, and that Christians should accept it and root themselves into it deeply.¹⁴⁷

The Methods of Christian Yoga

The Importance of Breathing

Proper breathing techniques have always been very important in Yoga practice. Traditional, non-Christian yogis teach that deep breathing can translate into deeper meditation and

¹⁴⁵ Bordenkircher, 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love.*

¹⁴⁷ Bordenkircher, 7-9.

union with divine being. Christian Yoga instructors also consider proper breathing skills to be crucial. In arguing their case for how important proper breathing is for a successful union with the divine, Christian yogis will cite the biblical account of creation: “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and breathed a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). According to “Holy Yoga” founder Brook Boon, God leaned over the body of Adam and blew His very own life into the man. Boon maintains that “every breath keeps us alive, and every breath we take is a direct gift from our Creator.”¹⁴⁸ Boon says conscious breathing has always been the very first discipline in the practice of Yoga.

Nancy Roth would readily offer a loud “amen” to Boon. Roth claims the physical act of breathing points to several spiritual realities. She says the process of inhalation and exhalation that keep human beings alive symbolizes the pattern of the Christian life of giving and receiving, emptying and filling, death and resurrection.¹⁴⁹

Yogi Susan Bordenkircher’s places an even higher value on the importance of proper breathing techniques than the two Christian Yoga instructors mentioned above. Bordenkircher has said “God’s presence is in your breath.”¹⁵⁰ To support her claim, Bordenkircher cites two verses from the Bible: “He himself [God] gives life and breath to everything” (Acts 17:25); “For the life of every living thing is in [God’s] hand, and the breath of all humanity” (Job 12:10).

Bordenkircher observes that without breath, men have no energy, no vitality, or earthly life. However, with breath, men experience renewed health, heightened awareness, a sense of calm, and freedom from stressful life.¹⁵¹ According to Bordenkircher, as the breathing of air is essential to

¹⁴⁸ Boon, 76.

¹⁴⁹ Roth, 17.

¹⁵⁰ Bordenkircher, 17.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

the body, so the spirit is essential to the soul. Bordenkircher insists proper Yoga breathing techniques must result not only in optimal physical and emotional health but also in direct spiritual contact with the Holy Spirit. She reminds of Jesus' Resurrection Sunday evening visit to his disciples: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:21-22).

Putting aside old-fashioned ideas about repenting from sin and pursuing a life of holiness, Bordenkircher says contact with the Holy Spirit and an intimate experience with God are obtainable solely through proper breathing methods. For Bordenkircher, breathing is by the grace of God, i.e. a blessing from God. Bordenkircher instructs her students to "[i]nhale the Holy Spirit. Exhale everything that is not of God. Inhale the power that comes from God. Exhale all that saps your strength. Inhale the freedom that comes only through Christ. Exhale and enjoy!"¹⁵² But like other Christian Yogis, Bordenkircher's methods for accessing God appear more mechanical than spiritual. Bordenkircher's several respiratory instructions do not include exhortations to depend entirely upon Jesus Christ, and to submit your life to His purposes for His glory.

Breathing Practice

As noted above, Christian Yoga instructors believe their students need to learn more effective ways to breathe. Brook Boon's Holy Yoga introduces several breathing styles to Christian Yoga practitioners. Boon believes that Yoga breathing is fundamental tool that aids Christians to concentrate better during prayer. Boon's Holy Yoga-style prayer breathing is accomplished without resorting to special postures. For what she calls "focused breathing," students are told to sit comfortably, straighten the, place their hands on their knees, close their eyes, and breathe only through nose. After that they are instructed to slowly begin to take their deep breaths, each one a little longer and deeper. The goal is to achieve the maximum volume of air to

¹⁵² Ibid., 19.

inhale and exhale. A conscious brief prayer is added while breathing. Students are instructed to say in their minds, “Lord, Jesus Christ,” and “have mercy on me,” always keeping their focus on the rhythm of breath and prayer.¹⁵³

Very similar to focused breathing is “belly breathing.” This technique focuses on expanding the belly while breathing, like a newborn baby. Boon claims this is a wonderful way to pray, citing Scriptures throughout the practice of Holy Yoga. Boon will read to her students from Psalm 16:11: “You will fill me,” she says as they inhale; “with joy in your presence,” as they exhale.¹⁵⁴

There is also a “retained breath exercise,” intended to increase the oxygenation of the blood, and for strengthening the lungs. Holy Yoga students are told to inhale for four seconds while mentally reciting a brief prayer. They are instructed to hold that breath for sixteen seconds, and then exhale for eight seconds while reciting the same verse again.¹⁵⁵

There is also what Boon calls the “cleansing breath.” This breathing technique entails attempting to use the lungs as a type of pump. Short, rapid, and strong breaths are taken during this breathing exercise. The cleansing breath method also cites Scriptures, but is mainly intended to create a burst of physical energy. Students must be careful not to become dizzy while employing this technique.¹⁵⁶

Holy Yoga includes taking the “victorious breath.” This breathing technique is the one most commonly employed during physical Yoga practice. It can be heard anywhere Yoga is practiced, creating a whispered “haaaa” sound from the back of breathing students’ throats.

¹⁵³ Boon, 77-8.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 78-9.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 79-80.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 80-1.

Students are told to inhale deeply, and then exhale through the nose. The effect is to create the above-described whispering sound.¹⁵⁷

Susan Bordenkircher stresses that proper Yoga breathing can increase the health of internal organs, and improve one's concentration. She instructs her students to sit crossed-legged on a mat and hold their spines erect. They are then told to experience God intimately by taking the deepest and longest breath they are capable of taking. According to Bordenkircher, since breathing is also the expression of an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, i.e. a communication from God, every breath—a gift from God—should also be a prayer back to God.¹⁵⁸ Through the quiet stillness in which God speaks to Yoga practitioners, Yoga breathing becomes a prayer to God.

Author and Christian yogi Richard Foster echoes Bordenkircher's thoughts in her 1983 book, *Meditative Prayer*:

In the center of our being we are hushed. The experience is more profound than mere silence or lack of words. There is stillness to be sure, but it is a listening stillness. We feel more alive, more active, than we ever do when our minds are askew with muchness and manyness. Something deep inside has been awakened and brought to attention. Our spirit is on tiptoe, alert and listening.¹⁵⁹

Methods of Meditation

Bordenkircher insists that the best way to pray includes Yoga breathing; the recitation of short "faith words," or Scripture; positive contemplation. A "breath prayer" is usually not spoken aloud. It is "spoken" within the heart, the mind focusing on the Lord. While performing the breath prayer, practitioners choose words or scriptures they can recite easily and "say" them directly to God. The prayer words chosen are intended to calm the mind, not challenge the practitioner's faith. With repetition of the breath prayer, practitioners empty themselves of themselves, making room

¹⁵⁷ Boon, 82.

¹⁵⁸ Bordenkircher, 20-3.

¹⁵⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Meditative Prayer* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1983), 21.

for the Holy Spirit to enter.¹⁶⁰ However, the “breath prayer” of Christian Yoga has no obvious equivalent in Scripture, or in traditional Christian practice. It appears to be nothing more than a “Christian mantra,” i.e. a type of chanting whose primary purpose is to “feel God” through the simple repetition of lyrics and rhythm.

Nancy Roth considers the act of meditation a type of “coming home,” i.e. the most basic and practical of spiritual acts. She recommends repeating silently a chosen word or phrase from the Bible with every breath. Roth does not hesitate to call these chosen words “mantras.” Roth’s strongly recommended mantras include “Jesus Christ;” “My Lord and my God;” “Holy Spirit;” “Be still and know that I am God;” and sometimes merely the word “God.”¹⁶¹ She also advocates using an anonymous author’s favorite expression, “the cloud of Unknowing.” Prayers that include these mantras are arrows shot through “the cloud of Unknowing” to God. She has a positive view of using images and icon with prayer. Prayer accompanied by the touching of smooth stones or rosary beads will help the practitioners achieve inner stillness. Roth claims the practice of Yoga is also an excellent preparation for other types of prayers, including intercessory prayer, deeply meditative prayer, and reflective prayers upon Scripture.¹⁶²

Because of numerous uses of the word “meditation” in the Bible, some Christian yogis have said that meditation is an ancient spiritual discipline that God’s people have practiced throughout history. Boon views as a shortcoming the traditional Western-style of prayer that relies solely on verbal communication with God without any prior preparation with meditation or contemplation. Boon insists biblical prayer is never one-sided communication, and that it has always required a time of silence and contemplation in order to discern God’s “voice” and will.

¹⁶⁰ Bordenkircher, 23-4.

¹⁶¹ Roth, 87.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Boon observes a meaningful difference between Christian meditation and Eastern Yoga meditation. According to Boon, Eastern Yoga meditation is about emptying and detachment; Christian meditation, on the other hand, is about emptying and making room for the Creator God. Biblically-based meditation is intended to increase the Christian's growth in Christ and spiritual maturity, i.e. it is a work of the Lord.¹⁶³ Some consider Boon's style of meditation to be a pseudo-Christian practice that has little or nothing to do with Christ's teachings on the subject as they are found in the Bible. Next chapter will examine more closely the claims of Christian yogis regarding meditation and its relationship to scripturally-based prayer.

Meditation to Prayer

Boon suggests these steps should be taken to insure successful Christian meditation:

Find a quiet place; Precede your meditation with some Yoga postures; Sitting upright is the preferred pose, because straight line helps to flow energy and breathing; Breathe in and out slowly, using the Focused Breathing; Read or recite on words or scriptures; At this point, you feel someone who is whispering very quietly—That someone is God.¹⁶⁴

Boon's suggested Christian meditation strategies are not uncontroversial. Conservative Christians recall the origins of various Yoga postures, including the need to sit upright. These Yoga postures emerged from Hindu pantheism. For example, sitting upright is an essential pose for *Kundalini* power. Other Christians who are knowledgeable about occult practices recognize the fact that the "someone who is whispering very quietly" is not always God. They maintain Satan and other evil Spirits are quite capable of doing the same thing. They insist Christians must "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world"(1 Jn. 4:1).

¹⁶³ Boon, 84-6.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 90.

Boon also advocates the use of the *Lectio Divina* (“divine reading”), spiritual or holy reading in Latin. The *Lectio Divina* entails a slow, contemplative prayer of the scriptures designed to enable the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union with God.¹⁶⁵ The *Lectio Divina* involves choosing a verse or passage from the Bible for meditation, and reading the words repeatedly, if necessary using various translations until every word is completely understood. Afterwards, the words read are pondered upon and contemplated in an attempt to enlarge the perspective. Finally, the passage is prayed aloud, and then the room is left in silence for God’s presence to be enjoyed.¹⁶⁶

Christian yogis wanted to use the *Lectio Divina* for Christian yoga meditation. However, Eugene Peterson said, “*Lectio Divina* is a way of reading the Scriptures that is congruent with the way the Scriptures serve the Christian community as a witness to God’s revelation of himself to us.”¹⁶⁷ Conservative evangelicals have objected that the exact meaning of the words of Scripture have been sacrificed in favor of an emphasis on sensual feelings. They warn that Christians who meditate on the Bible and then pray without attempting to elicit the truths that those scriptures contain are engaging in a heretical and pernicious form of Eastern mysticism.

Scorning the several concerns of conservative evangelicals, Susan Bordenkircher insists that God is always glorified when people meditate on Him. She claims intense meditation of the sort produced by Yoga practice cannot help but deepen concentration, and by deepening concentration allow for an even greater intimacy with God. Bordenkircher’s recipe for successful meditation includes quiet times and sites, as well as proper breathing. Moreover, for deeper

¹⁶⁵ Sisters of St. Clare, “The Process of *Lectio Divina*,” <http://www.rc.net/saginaw/srsclare/lectio.html> (accessed May 14, 2009).

¹⁶⁶ Boon, 91-92.

¹⁶⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2006), 81.

meditation she advises her students to use symbols, or picture imaginary scenes.¹⁶⁸ According to Bordenkircher, through these steps Christians can talk to God as if He were their closest friend, i.e. with openness, passion, and sincerity.¹⁶⁹

Clergy and theologians from every part of the Christian spectrum agree that Christians may obtain significant spiritual benefits from prayerful meditation upon the scriptures. However, conservative evangelicals and Roman Catholics are warning that meditation as conducted during Christian Yoga classes almost always places an inappropriate emphasis on subjective feelings at the expense of a cognitive focus on objective biblical truths.

Examples of Christian Yoga Classes

Parkwood Baptist Church, NC

Marlyn Mandeville started her Christian Yoga class at the Parkwood Baptist church in North Carolina. After visiting a class, journalist Alexander Alter wrote this report:

She sits crossed-legged on a mat with her students and their hands are folded as if in prayer. You can see the slogan “Know Yoga, Know Peace” on their shirts and hear the New Age flute music playing in the background. She says to the class “Namaste,” bowing deeply while offering the Sanskrit salutation, “I bow to the God within you.” You can also hear her saying “Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is light. Jesus said you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Yoga will free your body, let God free your life.” She has been teaching Yoga at Parkwood Baptist church for the past two years, and often has up to 75 participants in a single class.¹⁷⁰

St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church, Minnesota

Cindy Senarighi, a Lutheran pastor and founder of “Yoga Devotion” teaches Christian Yoga in her Lutheran church in Minnesota. According to *Time* magazine, her class is “part of a fast-growing movement that seeks to retool the 5,000-year-old practice of Yoga to fit Christ’s

¹⁶⁸ Bordenchiker, 156.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid,158.

¹⁷⁰ Alexandra Alter, “Yoga Stretches Traditional Christian Boundaries,” *Religion News Service*, <http://www.hvk.org/articles/0703/169.html> (accessed May 3, 2009).

teachings.¹⁷¹ She recommends today's mantra in her class, "Yahweh is a great breath prayer. The Jesus prayer also works. Now lift your arms in praise to the Lord."¹⁷² She believes that if Christian words are used as the mantras, or the intent in using Yoga is to reach Jesus, then it is perfectly all right to combine Yoga and Christianity. Pastor Senarighi says

One of the ways that I encourage my students to bring their Yoga practice and a Christian spiritual practice together is to think about a favorite Bible verse or Scripture, or any Christian mantra such as the word "Jesus" or "amen," and connect that with their body and their mind and their spirit in practice.¹⁷³

Additional Christian Yogas

Actress Janine Turner and "Christoga"

Actress Janine Turner, best known for her roles in movies like *Cliff Hanger*, *Northern Exposure*, and *Strong Medicine* has also made an inspirational Christian Yoga DVD named "Christoga." The DVD is one hour in length and features Turner reciting Scriptures while using Yoga postures for deeper meditation.¹⁷⁴ Christoga is essentially Hindu Yoga transformed to meet the needs of Christian Yoga. Christians have long used the same Christian terms and concepts without Yoga's deep meditation. However, many Christian Yoga instructors including Janine Turner are now using the Scriptures of the Bible and the postures of Yoga to enhance the spiritual experiences of devout Christians.

Yahweh Yoga

Yahweh Yoga is believed to be the first Christian Yoga in the world. According to Yahweh Yoga's mission statement, this movement is "passionate about growing, educating, and

¹⁷¹Ibid.

¹⁷² Lisa Takeuchi Cullen, "Stretching for Jesus." *Time South Pacific (Australia/New Zealand edition)* (September 05, 2005): 57-57. *Business Source Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 19, 2009)

¹⁷³ Caryl Matrisciana, *Yoga Uncoiled: From East to West*, DVD, Directed by Author. (Manefee, CA: Caryl Production, 2007).

¹⁷⁴ Janine Turner, *Christoga*, <http://www.janineturner.com/index.html>, (accessed April 19, 2009).

enabling individuals to improve their physical, mental and emotional health while strengthening their connection with God.” The several goals of Yahweh Yoga include:

Providing a sanctuary for people to connect to themselves and God through the practice of Yoga that is Christ-centered and enjoyed by all denominations of believers in Christ; creating and providing gold standard materials and training for others who have been called to teach Yoga in a Christ-centered manner; providing students with classes and educational opportunities that fit a variety of needs from healing & restorative, beginners, intermediate and advanced studies; educating all those interested in Christian Yoga about its benefits; improved physical and emotional health; greater self-acceptance; Increased connection with God; peace of mind; creating fellowship and connections in the Christian community for all levels of Yoga practitioners.¹⁷⁵

Praisemoves by Laurette Willis

Laurette Willis grew up in a Christian family where she had practiced Yoga with her mother. Yoga led her into a New Age lifestyle. As an adult she became a Christian through an encounter with Jesus Christ. She knew the spiritual pitfalls of Yoga, including Christian Yoga, and decided to develop a new exercise program that she entitled, “PraiseMoves.” She calls PraiseMoves “a Christian alternative to Yoga.”¹⁷⁶ Willis says that during her formative years she attended a church that taught an unconventional soteriology, i.e. one that was not well supported biblically. Spiritually hungry but lacking biblical knowledge, Willis’ mother felt a powerful attraction to a number of New Age practices and soon became immersed in all sorts of New Age movements. At last recognizing her sin, Willis burned all her New Age books and endeavored to become a genuinely faithful Christian.

Willis now rejects all Christian Yoga programs, insisting it is simply not possible for a serious devotee of Jesus Christ to obtain meaningful physical or spiritual benefits through Christian Yoga programs. On the contrary, according to Willis “Christian Yoga” is an oxymoron,

¹⁷⁵ “Yahweh Yoga Purpose and Mission Statement,” <http://yahwehyoga.com/about/mission-statement/> (accessed April 19, 2009).

¹⁷⁶ Holly Vicente Robaina, "The Truth About Yoga," *Today's Christian Woman* (April 2005), <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=33h-6EE8ED8E-2E0C4B2E&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, (accessed April 19, 2009).

analogous to “Christian Buddhism.” This is because the philosophy of Yoga does not recognize the sins of men, or their devastating consequences. Since sin for Yoga is a non-issue, there is no urgent need of a Savior for sins. Unlike traditional, orthodox Christianity, Yoga teaches that human sin is not an impediment to a rich, satisfying experience with the Divine Being. Willis asserts Yoga is deeply-rooted in historical Hinduism, and despite all claims to the contrary, Yoga cannot be neatly extracted from its pagan religious roots. Yoga stretching and Yoga meditation may lead people to experience the “deity” of Hinduism, but surely not the transcendent God of the Bible.

Willis observes that most “Christian Yoga” instructors themselves are deeply immersed in one or more popular New Age movements. Willis observes a typical Christian Yoga class and is appalled by the liberal use of New Age metaphysical terminology, and by the use of the Sanskrit language to offer praise to various Hindu deities. As the ultimate goal of traditional Yoga is to become “one with the universe,” whatever that may mean, *Hatha* Yoga practiced for physical benefits employs “postures and mantras”¹⁷⁷ which amount to a rejection of the teachings of the Bible. According to Willis, the claim that Hindu spirituality can be entirely removed from Yoga is a Satanic lie. Contra the Christian yogis mentioned above, Christian traditionalists like Willis insist the most knowledgeable Yoga instructors are well aware that all types of Yoga are reducible to Hinduism.¹⁷⁸

As an alternative to apostate Christian Yoga, Willis in 2001 developed “PraiseMoves,” a series of twenty physical stretches set to Scripture. Her website, www.praisemoves.com, promotes what Willis insists are numerous physical benefits to be obtained by her program. These include:

¹⁷⁷ One of the most famous of Yoga postures is “the posture of salute to the sun,” most often used at the beginning of Yoga class. Additionally, the word *Namaste* is often said at the close of Yoga classes, meaning “I bow to the god within you.”

¹⁷⁸ Robaina, *Ibid*.

PraiseMoves strives to balance flexibility, strength, endurance and relaxation. PraiseMoves assists weight loss, circulation, stress alleviation, and healing injuries. PraiseMoves can help keep tissues healthier and improves coordination and agility. PraiseMoves enhances one's ability to perform daily tasks and also improve one's posture and helps alleviate common aches and pains, reduce back pain, and increasing one's overall sense of health and well being.¹⁷⁹

Laurette Willis, while careful to stress the major differences between PraiseMoves and Christian Yoga, insists the physical benefits of both programs are almost same. Willis developed Praisemoves primarily for the physical benefits they offer, as opposed to promoting biblical truths. Willis admits she developed her fitness program for profit, not for evangelism, or for the praise of God.

It is difficult to say which has become the greater menace to traditional, orthodox Christianity, classic Yoga or "Christian Yoga." Willis' PraiseMoves, which promises a spiritually safe alternative to Christian Yoga, appears to be more intent on marketing a pragmatic as opposed to a biblically-based form of Christian spirituality. In such a culture many Christians are having difficulty deciding which form of Yoga, if any, can offer physical and emotional benefits without having to sacrifice God's blessing and truth. Conservative Christians are not wrestling with this question. They insist that the intermingling of traditional Christianity with the strange teachings and practices of Yoga constitutes a rejection of biblically-based Christianity in favor of an exotic and dangerous form of Eastern mysticism.

Christian Yoga & Pluralism

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, a pluralist who has taught theology at the Claremont School of Theology (United Methodist), insists that God is calling Christians to a new and intense form of mission activity in the world today. Professor Suchocki believes that Christendom's mission is not

¹⁷⁹ Laurette Willis, "Physical Benefits of Praise Moves," <http://www.praisemoves.com/physicalbenefits.html>, (accessed April 19, 2009).

to convert the world to Christianity but to friendship.¹⁸⁰ Clearly, Suchocki places a higher value on unity than purity.

Philosopher of religion John Hick, perhaps the most well-known advocate of religious pluralism, insists that (1) there is an ultimate reality to which the different religions are legitimate responses; (2) the various great religions are historically and culturally conditioned interpretations of this reality; (3) soteriological transformation is occurring roughly to the same extent within all the major religions.¹⁸¹ Professor Hick envisions many different paths that lead to the same religious truths.

As noted above, many who call themselves Christians use Yoga in prayer and devotion time for the purpose of upgrading their spirituality. Nancy Roth and her fellow yogis insist that Yoga helps Christians to quiet their bodies and minds so that they can enter into reflective prayer.¹⁸² But conservative Christians warn that the use of different types of Yoga by those who identify themselves as Christians in to obtain a more intimate relationship with God is a vivid example of modern religious pluralism, i.e. a heresy. Their defense of traditional, biblically-based Christianity, i.e. Christian orthodoxy, and opposition to so-called “Christian Yoga” will be the focus of the next chapter.

¹⁸⁰ Marjorie Suchocki, *Divinity & Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 109.

¹⁸¹ Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 221

¹⁸² Roth, 7.

CHAPTER FOUR

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO “CHRISTIAN” YOGA

The widespread practice of many types of Yoga throughout the Western world, particularly in the United States of America, well reflects the dominant religious and philosophical themes of this Post-Christian age: religious pluralism, and Postmodernism. Since the conquests of Islam that began in the Seventh Century, the Christian West has been forced to deal with the problem of religious pluralism.¹⁸³ By the late Twentieth Century, according to Christian apologist David F. Wells, there were no fewer than 1,200 organized religious bodies in the USA, ranging from Presbyterians to Satanists.¹⁸⁴ The problems created by religious pluralism today are very similar to the challenges faced by the prophets and apostles of the Bible who lived in a world dominated by paganism. First Century Christians opposed their secular and pagan-dominated cultures with the truth of Jesus Christ; Twenty-First Century Christians can and should respond to the grievous errors religious pluralism is promulgating throughout their societies with the truths contained in God’s holy Word, the Bible.

Sadly, a large percentage of Western churches today, including many American churches, are mired in liberalism and pragmatism. Good health, financial success, and overall personal well-being are the “gospel” these churches are sharing with this world. A pragmatic culture has developed in America and in many of its churches, causing Americans to regard “truth as whatever works for any given person.”¹⁸⁵ The New Age movement is based upon a similar attitude toward achieving the Good Life, and the practice of all types of Yoga coincided with the popularity of the

¹⁸³ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 262.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, This figure is derived from Gordon J. Melton, *A Directory of the Religious Bodies in the United States* (New York: Garland, 1977).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

New Age movement, of which it was a significant part. As shown in the previous chapter, many devout Christians believe Yoga should be counted among God's blessings, mainly because of Yoga's promotion of physical, psychological, and spiritual health. But those who still believe the Bible should remain the final arbiter of Christian faith and practice have concluded that "Christian Yoga" is in fact a contradiction in terms, i.e. a heresy that like all heresies cannot help but weaken the Body of Christ, i.e. the Church. This chapter will focus on the serious problems and dangers posed by Christian Yoga, and the biblical responses that can and must be given to its misguided evangelists.

The Different Perspectives of God and Man

Kundalini: The Serpent's Power

In ancient Near Eastern art and literature the serpent was often presented as a significant character. The serpent, who was often worshiped, represented wisdom, fertility, health, chaos, and even immortality.¹⁸⁶ Modern Hinduism still reverences the serpent's power. Hindu psychology teaches that at the base of the human spine is a beautiful triangle in which lies the *kundalini*, also called "serpent power." In Yoga, there is no attempt to hide the vital role of the serpent. One of the well-known positions in Yoga is called the cobra.¹⁸⁷ The *kundalini* is believed to empower the individual to perform miracles, and to achieve liberation. Yoga uses many means to awaken the *kundalini*.¹⁸⁸ The late El Collie, a *Kundalini* enthusiast and blogger, wrote:

When the Kundalini awakens, tremendous power is unleashed. The resulting expansion of consciousness affects every element of our being, from our biological functions to our personal relationships to our concept of reality to our influence in the world. We are irrevocably changed in ways we could not have imagined and in ways we may never fully comprehend.

¹⁸⁶ T. Desmond Alexander, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 736.

¹⁸⁷ Hunt, 96.

¹⁸⁸ Enroth, 52.

For some of us, the risen Kundalini gives us our first or most unmistakable contact with the Spirit... Kundalini is Shakti, the Great Mother Goddess, the living energy that daily makes her vibrant presence known in my body and my psyche. She is as fierce and powerful as she is mysterious and enticing.

Whether or not anyone else shares my deified view, Kundalini is not a blind force of nature because there are no blind forces of nature (with the possible exception of the human mind!). Approaching Kundalini with arrogance, impatience or greed is asking for trouble. Usually, mercifully, such attitudes assure that one's own Kundalini will not stir at all. If Kundalini is to be invoked, it must be with care and better still, with reverence and humility. We are treading sacred waters here. To plunge in recklessly is to risk self-annihilation.¹⁸⁹

Interestingly, the serpent is not only a recurring benevolent figure in mythology and in many primitive religions, but it is also a symbol employed by modern Western medicine. Incredibly, Yoga, which comes from serpent-worshipping Hinduism, has now been welcomed into many Western churches, including fundamentalist ones. Yoga, which promises physical fitness, mental health, and spiritual enlightenment, has managed to permeate Bible-believing churches by concealing the fact that “*kundalini* power” is derived from the Serpent.¹⁹⁰ Orthodox Christians claim “Christian” yogis are attempting to conflate the practice of being filled with so-called *kundalini* power with the Apostle Paul’s command to “be filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹¹

The Danger of *Kundalini* Yoga

John Ankerberg and John Weldon have documented that *kundalini* arousal or its equivalent is not limited to the practice of Yoga. In their study of 70 new religions they discovered that *kundalini* arousal or something like it in almost half of them.¹⁹² Hindu gurus are typically possessed by demonic spirits. These gurus describe their experience as “god-possession,” or

¹⁸⁹ El Collie, “Kundalini: Danger – High Voltage Kundalini Awakening,” <http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/kundalini/id/35190> (accessed June 5, 2009).

¹⁹⁰ Hunt, 98.

¹⁹¹ Ephesians 5:18.

¹⁹² Ankerberg and Weldon, 606.

“divine companionship,” and it is achieved directly through *kundalini* activity.¹⁹³ While in an “altered state,” reached either through drugs or Yoga practice, the normal connection between the human spirit and brain is loosened. The disconnection allows another spirit—a demonic one—to enter the brain and operate it. Yogis may wish to describe the practice as “self-realization,” but the third chapter of Genesis tells how the Serpent in Eden deceived human beings by offering a similar promise of deity.¹⁹⁴

Yoga practice is designed to alter one’s consciousness, and to bring occult transformation. Occult expert John White observes that the essence of occultism is the attempt to gain higher knowledge and life energy called *prana* through the use of magic and psychic phenomena. White warns “the heart of genuine occult practices appear to be synonymous with aspects of the *kundalini* concept.”¹⁹⁵ The *kundalini* power therefore poses serious physical, mental, and spiritual dangers. Even standard Yoga books have warned of the serious dangers arising from supposedly “wrong” Yoga practice. In their *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* John Ankerberg and John Weldon cite authoritative Yoga texts that document the hazards of certain Yoga practices, which include death. For example, a common Yoga breath control practice known as *pranayama*, conducted without expert guidance, has been known to cause debilitating injuries and diseases.¹⁹⁶

Gopi Krishna warns of the dangers of the practice of seemingly innocuous *Hatha* Yoga:

In *Hatha* Yoga the breathing exercises are more strenuous, attended by some abnormal positions of the chin, the diaphragm, the tongue, and other parts of the body to prevent expulsion or inhalation of air into the lungs in order to induce a state of suspended breathing. This can have drastic effects on the nervous system and the brain, and it is obvious that such a

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ John White, 363-4.

¹⁹⁶ Ankerberg and Weldon, 604.

discipline can be very dangerous. Even in India, only those prepared to face death dare to undergo the extreme discipline of *Hatha* Yoga.¹⁹⁷

The reason why *Hatha* Yoga is very dangerous is because it can cause *kundalini* arousal. Gopi Krishna pointed out that *kundalini* arousal typically results in temporary states of insanity, radical changes in the physical body, and possession by a demonic spirit.¹⁹⁸

As well as posing serious physical and mental dangers, *Kundalini* arousal also creates a very dangerous spiritual state. There are similar situations to the awakening of *kundalini* in Christian mysticism. Christian yogi Philip St. Romain observes that *kundalini* arousal takes place in the context of contemplative prayer. He uses the word “contemplation” to describe a wide range of affective and silent prayer forms. He experiences “a sense of being grasped by God” in the depth of contemplation—he called it “the still point” where God and he intermingled in Spirit.¹⁹⁹ Through his Christian experience with *kundalini*, St. Romaine claims to have realized that Christ is the one “through whom all things came into being, and apart from whom nothing came to be” (John 1:3). St. Romaine insists that he experiences Christ as the center of his ego.²⁰⁰ However, critics observe that such an experience is not biblical, but is instead the result of St. Romaine’s own expectation of a mystic union with God while in a still and silent mood.

The Biblical Response to the Serpent’s Power

The Bible expresses a negative opinion about the Serpent’s Power. As noted above, in Genesis 3 it was shrewdness and malice of the serpent that tempted and defeated the first man and woman in Eden. Old Testament commentator Allen P. Ross observed,

¹⁹⁷ Gopi Krishna, “The true aim of yoga,” *Psychic* (January-February 1973):13, quoted in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 605.

¹⁹⁸ Gopi Krishna, *The Awakening of Kundalini* (New York: Dutton, 1975),148.

¹⁹⁹ Philip A. St. Romain, *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality: A Pathway to Growth and Healing* (New York: Crossroad, 1991). 96.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 106.

“The method was shrewd and calculated. It was not a direct denial of God’s commandment—not yet anyway. The question raised was not easy to answer... Its purpose, however, was to engage the woman in a discussion about the commandment. It gave the woman an opportunity to justify herself and defend God.”²⁰¹

The Serpent’s temptation raised doubts about the integrity of God, employed an appeal to the couple’s senses, and finally succeeded in causing her and her husband to disregard a direct command given by God.

In the Bible, the Serpent and Dragon are both symbolic of the arch enemy of God and man, Satan. Yoga believes the Serpent’s power may be the best way to meet with God, but in the Bible the serpent is described as the worst enemy of human beings, challenging God’s integrity and tempting the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden. In chapters 12 and 20 of the book of Revelation this truth is described vividly through scenes depicting the Serpent’s violent reaction to failures.²⁰² Therefore, the process of accessing so-called *kundalini* power from the practice of Yoga should be characterized as a type of Satanic practice. One of the goals of Yoga is to enhance the self by realizing one’s innate godhood, a goal that must give glory to the human being, not to God.²⁰³ Nonetheless Western yogis insist that men can meet God and have divine union with God because Yoga does not have artificial religious dogmas and relies instead on scientific and universal principles.²⁰⁴

Yoga’s mystical lie is comparable to original temptation in Eden. The Serpent’s lie in the Garden of Eden, “*You will be like God,*” is the heart of Yoga’s goal, in spite of its feeble protests

²⁰¹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 134.

²⁰² “He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years” (Rev 20:2, NIV). “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”

²⁰³ Hunt, 27.

²⁰⁴ Yogananda, 32-3.

that Yoga is non-religious.²⁰⁵ Satan was defeated under Jesus' feet on the cross.²⁰⁶ Satan will be cast into the lake of fire at the end of the Millennial kingdom, where he will dwell for the rest of eternity.²⁰⁷ Satan, however, constantly tempts and allures believers to fall into sin. Far from being considered another one of God's blessings, the practice of Yoga should be considered a potentially fatal temptation, and grouped among Satan's most effective strategies for ensnaring modern Christians who have foolishly made an idol of their physical well-being. Eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil through Satan's temptation was the starting point of humankind's fall. Today, Yoga, which came from the idea of becoming just like God, is pulling Christians into a deep spiritual pit, out of which many will not be able to climb. The lie at the root of Yoga is the same as the one told by the Serpent in the garden of Eden: humankind can become like God. Therefore, Bible-believing Christians should reject Christian Yoga because it involves attempting to gain divine knowledge through extra-biblical as well as satanic practices.

The Point View of Salvation

Pitfalls of Christian Meditation

In spite of the admitted danger of *kundalini* power in the practice of Yoga, more and more church members are becoming involved with Yoga. In liberal Christian denominations, e.g., the Episcopalians, most church leaders and members appear to be completely untroubled by the underlying occult issues attendant the practice of Yoga, focusing instead on the greater spiritual power, enlightenment, and closer union with God Yoga promises. However, the story of Mineda J. McCleave, a converted Christian, may serve to rouse some discerning liberals from complacency.

²⁰⁵ Hunt, 14.

²⁰⁶ John 12:31.

²⁰⁷ Revelation 20:10; Matthew 25:41.

Mineda J. McCleave struggled mightily with Christian mysticism after becoming fascinated with occult literature. McCleave would later misinterpret her *kundalini* experience as the baptism of the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁸ McCleave is not the only Christian to have fallen into this Yoga-laid trap. Many Church members today are ignoring the dangers and misinterpreting occult phenomena associated with Yoga as a genuine experience with the Holy Spirit. According to the Bible, however, it is not necessary to experience occult practices in order to receive the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁹

India-born journalist Caryl Matrisciana explains that the exercises and breathing techniques of Yoga actually do release the same neurological energies that are released by abuse of certain narcotics, and by other mystical practices. Very often the goal of both drug abuse and Yoga meditation is to escape from the intense pressures of real life. Both produce physiological changes in the body and brain, and euphoric experiences. Matrisciana says Christian Yoga meditation brings about the very same state of altered consciousness produced by *Hatha* Yoga, New age meditation, and several hallucinogenic drugs.²¹⁰ To experience the stilling or emptying of the mind, Yoga practitioners first master the physical postures and movements of Yoga meditation.²¹¹ Matrisciana maintains that the spiritual experience obtained through Christian Yoga meditation and contemplative prayer is essentially enchantment, or divination²¹²

²⁰⁸ Ankerberg and Weldon, 608.

²⁰⁹ Ephesians 3:18.

²¹⁰ Matrisciana, 187.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

²¹² Divination is "foretelling future events, or discovering things secret by the aid of superior beings, or other than human means." It is used in Scripture as an example of false systems of ascertaining the divine will. Divination has been used throughout the ages by all nations, civilized and savage alike. Cf. <http://www.bible-history.com/smiths/D/Divination/> (accessed on June 12, 2009).

The Unique Way of Salvation: Jesus Christ

There are many forms of Yoga, many ways to alter personal consciousness, and many types of mystical experience. If consciousness can be altered by human effort, then there can be as many ways to alter consciousness as there are ways to exert human effort. Whether Yoga is considered an attempt to isolate the soul from the physical nature, or an attempt to unite the human self with the divine self, the result is a low view of physical reality, and the human body. Out-of-body experiences are still the goal of some popular forms of Yoga.²¹³

The Gospel of John shows that Jesus Christ is the unique way to Heaven. Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”²¹⁴ Jesus Christ then is The Way to the truth, and The Way to life. The Bible is clear: no one can receive salvation except through Jesus Christ. Dr. George Alexander, the author of *Yoga, the Truth Behind the Posture*, talks about Yoga meditation as a means to God.

You cannot force Jesus to come into your life. But a mantra is something that...forces a spirit to come into your life. The Bible very clearly teaches you cannot force the Spirit of God to come into your life by repeating His name.²¹⁵

The Bible teaches that the presence of God cannot be manipulated by man’s desire for His presence. The born-again Christian has a personal connection with God through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The only connection man has to God is made by Jesus Christ Himself, not by physical poses, repetitious mantras, mechanical breathing, or meditative prayer.²¹⁶ The Apostle Peter proclaims, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given

²¹³ Hunt, 27.

²¹⁴ John 14:6.

²¹⁵ Matrisciana, *Yoga Uncoile*, DVD.

²¹⁶ Matrisciana, *Out of India*, 188.

to men by whom we must be saved.”²¹⁷ Yoga practitioners want to find and develop inner divine power and become like God through the Serpent power found in Yoga meditation. Some claim that Yoga meditation is the best way to find salvation, and that the Serpent power is in fact the power of salvation.

Contra the false-teaching Christian yogis, Jesus Christ proclaimed

I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.²¹⁸

Jesus also warned, “the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.”²¹⁹ In Jesus’ parable, there are three characters besides the sheep: The Good Shepherd, the hired hand, and the thief.

A thief trespasses the fence to steal, kill, or destroy the sheep. The practice of Yoga is to Christianity what the thief is to the sheep. Secular Yoga gurus aim for physical and emotional well-being outwardly, but inside they challenge God spiritually through the use of *kundalini* power. In the end the man who is captured by *kundalini* power will be judged and destroyed as the serpent of Eden and the dragon of the future Millennium. Hired hands are not the same as thieves and robbers. They work to protect and feed their sheep. However, they do not work for the sheep, but for themselves. When the sheep are in danger, the hired hands give up the sheep and quit their jobs. They do not take on the responsibility of defending the sheep from attacking wolves. A hired hand is similar to a Christian yogi. Outwardly, Christian yogis seemed to serve the church with biblical

²¹⁷ Acts 4:12.

²¹⁸ John 10:11-4.

²¹⁹ John 10:1.

principles, but they never take a responsibility for the grave spiritual danger Yoga poses for their churches.

Jesus Christ is not a thief or a hired hand, but the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep. D.A. Carson observes

The shepherd does not die for his sheep to serve as an example, throwing himself off a cliff in a grotesque and futile display while bellowing, “See how much I love you!” No, the assumption is that the sheep are in mortal danger; that in their defense the shepherd loses his life; that by his death they are saved. That, and that alone, is what makes him the Good Shepherd.²²⁰

According to the Apostle Paul, Jesus Christ, “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on the cross!”²²¹ The Bible is clear: humans can obtain salvation only by accepting Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross; struggling to obtain some form of mystical union with God through strange Yoga practices will not help.

The Apostle wrote that non-Christians do not desire God.²²² The unregenerate reject having a personal relationship with God, and instead want to be their own gods. Clearly Satan’s lie in the Garden of Eden still stimulates human pride. Jesus warned, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.”²²³ The Apostle Paul told the church at Rome, “do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what

²²⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 386.

²²¹ Philippians 2:5-8.

²²² Romans 3:11.

²²³ Matthew 7:13-14.

God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.”²²⁴ The Apostle encouraged the church at Ephesus to “put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.”²²⁵ Christians, as good soldiers, should fight the good fight against all satanic lies, including the satanic lie that Eastern-born Yoga is entirely compatible with biblically-based Christianity.

The Fruit of Christian Life

False Claims of Christian Yogis

As noted above, Nancy Roth claimed “Christians can use repetition of brief chosen words, imagining the images, and touching icons when they pray,” and Susan Bordenkicher insisted “successful meditation . . . needs quiet times and sites, as well as proper breathing and symbols or picture imaginary scenes.” However, Jesus Christ contradicted both Roth and Bordenkicher when he said “When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”²²⁶ Simple repetition of brief expressions cannot make God come into peoples’ hearts. Good feeling is not like the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christian life is not enhanced by babbling simple words and meditating on images and icons, but by discovering the authentic meaning of God’s words. Paul told the churches at Thessalonica, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”²²⁷

²²⁴Romans:12:1-2.

²²⁵ Ephesians 6:11-12.

²²⁶ Matthew 6:7.

²²⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-8.

Christians should seek to find God's will and to obey it, not for a union with God through mystic practices. It was noted above that Christian yogi Brooke Boon avers "[t]he practice of Holy Yoga enables Christians to pursue the union of their bodies and minds with God's Holy Spirit through physical postures, breathing, and meditation." But orthodox Christianity insists the purpose of biblical meditation is to bring historical event involving God into the present life, not to unite with God through mystical Yoga practices. New-Agers believe that that Jesus called Christians "little gods" (John 10:34), and Mormons misuse this verse to support their view of a plurality of gods.²²⁸ Jesus Christ, however, did not lend any support to the obstructed views of pantheists and polytheists. Jesus Christ was merely responding to the Jews who rejected Jesus' claim to divinity, and who wished to stone Him for citing Psalms 86:6: "I said you are gods." Jesus meant that if Judges were called "gods," how much more should God's son be called God?! Therefore, John 10:34 does not claim humanity's divinity, but Jesus Christ's. Professor Norman Geisler says that New Agers cannot defend their false claim that John 10:34 proves humans may become divine through Yoga practice.²²⁹

Interspirituality—the Fruit of Mysticism

During the early 2000s generalizing postmodernism, a new concept of the Emerging Church, appeared.²³⁰ Dan Kimball, a leader of the Emerging Church movement, insisted that the Church of Jesus Christ needed to transform itself to adapt to the changed conditions of the new, post-Christian era. Kimball explained that the main themes of the modern era were monotheism, rationality, religion, propositional, systematical, local, individualistic, truth, but the themes of the

²²⁸ Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods?'" (NIV).

²²⁹ Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *Correcting the Cults: Expert Responses to Their Scripture Twisting* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Books, 2005), 177-8.

²³⁰ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2003), 44.

post-Christian era include pluralism, experientialism, mysticism, narrative, fluidity, and universality.²³¹ The modern mindset held that that facts influence beliefs, and then beliefs influenced behavior, but in today's post-Christian culture experience influences behavior, and behaviors influence belief.²³² Therefore, the Emerging Church prefers the use of arts, media, and technology over a simple preaching of the Scriptures themselves. The Emerging Church movement emphasizes experiential spirituality, and de-emphasizes dogmatic teaching.²³³

Many consider the Emerging Church to be a genuine Christian movement but Caryl Matrisciana believes it is better understood as an offshoot of the New Age movement, i.e. traceable to Hinduism. She says that the driving force of the Emerging Church is essentially a mystical or contemplative type of spirituality. Matrisciana contends this pseudo-Christian movement is a part of an "interspirituality movement," a movement that emphasizes the divinity of men.²³⁴ Alan Jones, an Episcopal priest, explains the heresies associated with interspiritual faith in the Emerging Church in this way:

Another ancient strand of Christianity teaches that we are all caught up in the Divine Mystery we call God, that the Spirit is in everyone, and that there are depths of interpretation yet to be plumbed.... At the cathedral we "break the bread" for those who follow the path of the Buddha and walk the way of the Hindus.²³⁵

Jones' above comments uncover the rhetorical goals of emerging spirituality: God is in all human beings; truth is relative and needs to be continually redefined; all religions are paths to God.

²³¹ Ibid, 61.

²³² Ibid, 187.

²³³ Ibid, 144.

²³⁴ Matrisciana, 194.

²³⁵ Alan W Jones, *Reimagining Christianity: Reconnect Your Spirit Without Disconnecting Your Mind* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 89.

Clearly, the New Age movement can be fairly characterized as eastern mysticism, and amounts to a rejection of the most important teachings contained in God's Word, the Bible.

Regrettably, many in the Emerging Church movement are abandoning biblical truth in a misguided attempt to unite with all religions. This movement has also shown a willingness to embrace Eastern-style, mystical prayer and practices. Emerging Church author Brennan Manning claims "the first step in faith is to stop thinking about God at the time of prayer" and "choose a single sacred word... repeat the sacred word inwardly, slowly, often."²³⁶ And again, as noted above, Christian yogi Nancy Roth attaches a mystical meaning to the physical act of breathing by saying that "physical breathing symbolizes the pattern of the Christian life." Caryl Mastriciana insists that these styles of contemplative prayer belong in the same category with Yoga practice rooted in Hinduism. Mastriciana insists this type of contemplative prayer is connected to interspirituality, and to pantheism.²³⁷

Godliness vs. Myths

Traditionalists insist it is simply not possible to be a genuine Christian and subscribe to and advocate unbiblical practices. Even so, as noted in the previous chapter, Susan Bordenkicher has claimed that "Yoga is common grace and also God's blessing and gift like fast-paced music or rock music. The intent of the user is important." The Bible, however, warns God's people not to emulate pagan customs and practices. The following passage from the Old Testament book of 2 Kings describes the religious syncretism partly responsible for Israel's eventual destruction as a nation by the Assyrian Empire in the Eighth Century B. C., and should serve as a warning to discerning Christians of every era:

²³⁶ Brennan Manning, *The Signature of Jesus* (Sisters, Or: Multnomah, 1996), 212.

²³⁷ Mastriciana, 201.

Nevertheless, each national group made its own gods in the several towns where they settled, and set them up in the shrines the people of Samaria had made at the high places. The men from Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men from Cuthah made Nergal, and the men from Hamath made Ashima; the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. They worshiped the LORD, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places. They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought.²³⁸

During His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) Jesus sternly warned not to try to serve both God and money. Some Christians recognize “money” as Yoga practice. Godly Christians have no choice but to follow God’s commands and decrees, which include this warning: “Do not do as *they* do.”²³⁹

Author Ronald Enroth observed, “the exercises of Yoga indeed give flexibility to our bodies, but unfortunately the philosophy of Yoga gives too much flexibility to our morals.”²⁴⁰ Christian yogis assure their students that their bodies are holy temples, and teach that Christians should glorify God in their bodies.²⁴¹ Thus, they assert that Christians can exercise Yoga for glorifying God. Enroth’s book includes an excerpt from an article on Yoga in the *New York Times*: “After mastering the physical discipline, many students are eager to embrace Yoga’s underlying philosophy. Yoga isn’t just a stretch class; it is supposed to be a place where the physical and the spiritual meet.”²⁴² A number of Christians have assumed naively that Yoga is a spiritually neutral practice. These believers have chosen to ignore the 5,000 year-old Hindu claim that says the

²³⁸ 2 Kings 17:29-33.

²³⁹ 2 Kings 17:15.

²⁴⁰ Enroth, 58.

²⁴¹ Boon, 24.

²⁴² Enroth, 43.

physical body is a gateway to spiritual liberation and enlightenment.²⁴³ Is it possible that the savviest spiritual leaders of Hinduism understand that Yoga may be the best way of evangelizing the West?

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourselves to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”²⁴⁴ The pursuit of physical fitness is desirable because our bodies are a part of God’s good creation. God made our bodies his temple. Furthermore, there is certain logic in the Yogic tradition of making spirituality the real goal of physical training. The spirituality of Yoga, however, is errant, even if the exercises are beneficial. Christians should remember that humankind is sinful, not merely ignorant, as Yoga would have us believe.

Chapter three above noted that *Holy Yoga* author Brooke Boon has claimed that “Unity in Christ is a beautiful and biblical design for His people, and that is the idea of Holy Yoga.” Unity in Christ is undeniably God’s will, and among the purposes of prayer for both Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul. They, however, said nothing about achieving unity by the practice of Yoga. Human beings as sinners meet Jesus Christ personally through believing in the incarnation of God and His redemption of their own sins by Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary’s cross. And, in God’s good time, real Christians who have chosen to live as Christ’s holy bride will be united with their coming Lord.

Christian apologist David Wells insists that orthodox Christianity is established on the resurrection of Christ; it had nothing to do with religious imagination or symbols of inner experience. Wells believes churches should rely on historical revelation, not mystical experience

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴1 Timothy 4:7-8.

and the fertile imagination of all manner of New Age spirituality.²⁴⁵ Wells reminds that the early church members did not preach *their* experience of Christ, but rather Christ's experience. Through preaching of historical events—not inner experiences—the original Christians made Christianity unique, and easily distinctive from the religions of pagans.²⁴⁶ If Christians recommend Yoga experience for enhancing their faith and make their faith dependent upon the effects of Yoga, churches will be wide open to all types of Neo-pagan ideas and demonically-influenced New Age spirituality.

Today, some Christians open their hearts to Christian Yoga, hoping to enjoy a new flow of well-being. Christian Yoga, however, is an oxymoron; Christians should exercise Godliness through God's Word, and on the basis of the historical truth of Jesus' redemption, resurrection, and inevitable Second Advent. Biblically-based Christianity is the only genuine form of Christianity because it is based upon God's objective revelation, not man's subjective emotional experience.

²⁴⁵ Wells, 269.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 278.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Chapter one presented an overview of historical Hinduism and the practice of Yoga. Hinduism is the most ancient of the world's major religions, and its tradition includes the obtaining of wisdom and energy from "Divine Reality" through the repetition of sacred chants. Hindu philosophy teaches there is a true liberation, *Moksha*, the awakening and enlightenment from ignorance, and salvation from the endless cycle of death and rebirth caused by one's *karma*. In traditional Hinduism, the several practices designed to obtain that salvation are known as "Yoga." Hinduism has various ways of obtaining *Moksha*, but all different paths of Yoga lead to the same destination.

The image of a chariot driver and the "layers of self" depict the steps and processes of Yoga practice vividly. There are several type of Yoga practices, including the classical Yogas *karma* Yoga, *bhakti* yoga, and *jnana* yoga, each of them mentioned in the venerable Hindu text, the *Bhagavad-Gita*. *Karma* Yoga is a system of discipline designed to obtain *Moksha* through good works; *bhakti* Yoga seeks salvation through the worship of Hindu gods; *jnana* Yoga through the acquisition of spiritual knowledge.

Raja yoga is the most important Yoga discussed in the *Yoga Sutra* by the ancient yogi sage Patanjali. *Raja* yoga contains eight steps for reaching *Brahman*. Among the many types of Yoga practiced in the West, *hatha* Yoga is the most popular. *Hatha* Yoga concentrates on two techniques, physical postures and breath control, especially as they are described in Patanjali's *raja* Yoga.

The second chapter focused on the successful migration of Eastern Yoga to the Western world, and the great influence Yoga has had on Western culture, including some of the West's popular music, movies, and lifestyle choices. It was observed that the sudden spread of Hindu Yoga throughout the Western world was facilitated by the great popularity of several Hindu yogis,

including Mohandas Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda. Hinduism has had a major impact on American and British popular music. The Beatles were inspired by Shankar, and gave strength to the New Age movement with their embrace of spiritual fusion. Many movies and TV series have been influenced by Hindu philosophy. The Hippie movement, the Hare Krishnas, and devotees of Transcendental Meditation also have significant connections to the modern practice of Yoga.

Yoga, which emphasizes not only physical and mental health but also spiritual enlightenment, is planting deep roots in every corner of the secular, stressful West. Scientifically-minded Westerners have been attracted by the scientific aspects of Yoga. Many Westerners who began practicing Yoga mainly for health reasons have also been attracted to the spiritual aspects of Yoga. However, most do not realize that the spiritual foundation of Yoga is the serpent power, *kundalini*.

Iyengar Yoga and Integral yoga are among the most popular species of Yoga being practiced in America. *Iyengar* Yoga, named in honor of its creator, yogi B.K.S. Iyengar, focuses on the structural arrangement of the physical body through the development of postures. Integral Yoga, developed by Sri Swami Satchidananda, is a synthesis of several strong points from various Yogas.

The third chapter reviewed the great influence Yoga is currently exerting in many American churches. Indian yogis who, ironically, learned many of their missionary strategies from British evangelicals, are now enjoying great success spreading the gospel of Yoga to the Western world. Yoga centers can be found in business centers, hospitals, fitness clubs, and even in local churches all across the USA. Moreover, many Christians who are preoccupied with their personal well-being are becoming increasingly open to various forms of Eastern mysticism. Many of them, who identify themselves as sincere Christians, are hard at work developing and promoting “Christian Yoga.” In her book, *An invitation to Christian Yoga*, Nancy Roth, who preaches what

she calls “an incarnated Yoga theology,” has like many other Christian yogis chosen to ignore the historical and philosophical foundations of Yoga and emphasize its practical effects instead. Brooke Boon, author of *Holy Yoga*, regards “Holy Yoga” as a type of bodily prayer, emphasizing the most important aspects of that type of prayer: poses; breathing techniques; and meditation. Boon also insists that through Holy Yoga Christians can realize the “unity of Christ” prayed for by Jesus in the seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel, and later encouraged by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the churches at Ephesus. Susan Bordenkircher, promoter of “Christ-centered Yoga,” contends that Yoga is the common grace of God, and that only the religious intent of the Yoga user is important. But the practice of Christian Yoga includes potentially harmful breathing techniques, brief mantras, strange images, alien icons, and the exercise of undirected imagination.

The third chapter also looked at several churches that practice Christian Yoga, and cited other examples of the practice of Christian Yoga made popular by the Internet and other forms of mass media. Laurette Wills, creator of “Praisemoves,” has concluded that Christian Yoga is another direction in the New Age movement. Wills, a businesswoman, touts the physical benefits of Praisemoves, and appears unconcerned with any possible conflicts her Praisemoves may have with the truth of the Bible. It was concluded that the experiential spirituality being promoted by Christian yogis gives every appearance of being a roadmap to religious pluralism.

The fourth chapter argued for a return to the biblically-based form of Christianity that many Western churches appear to have sacrificed on the altar of pragmatism. This chapter warned that many Western churches practice not only the physical exercises of Yoga, but also the spiritual exercises. These spiritual exercises include meditative prayers that employ the mystic techniques of Yoga. In short, churches that involve themselves with Yoga are fine examples of religious pluralism, not the Bride of Christ.

This chapter presented three arguments against Christian Yoga. Firstly, Christians should reject Christian Yoga because it is inseparable from its historical foundation: the serpent power, *kundalini*. There can be no doubt that exercising the so-called *kundalini* power poses serious physical, mental, and spiritual dangers. According to the Bible, the *kundalini* power is in fact the same power that was used by the trickster in Eden (Genesis 3), and by the condemned loser in the final judgment (Revelation 20).

Secondly, Christians should refuse Christian Yoga because its primary purpose is to unite God with man by human efforts. In point of fact the Bible does not say that human beings may connect with and be united to God through their own creative and strenuous efforts. The Bible says that “there is one God and *one mediator between God and men*, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Timothy 2:5-6a; emphasis added). Orthodox Christianity avers that there is but one way for human beings to unite with God, and that is by becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd who sacrificed His life for His sheep.

Lastly, Christians must shun the practice of Christian Yoga because it is a hopelessly confused cocktail of mystical and experiential spirituality. An unwarranted emphasis on experiential spirituality subjects objective Biblical truths to the whims of subjective personal experience. Christians should reject Christian Yoga because it amounts to an endorsement of religious pluralism. Christian Yoga is a high profile symbol and component part of today’s New Age movement. And the last thing a devotee of Jesus Christ needs is to become ensnared by exotic styles of Eastern, mystic meditation.

Apologist David F. Wells laments, many “Western churches have turned from dependence upon God to management of God.”²⁴⁷ These Western churches need to repent from this God-

²⁴⁷ Wells, 196.

dishonoring attitude, and return to a Christianity founded and supported by the Bible. Rather than embrace “Christian Yoga” and other forms of Eastern mysticism, Western churches need to be on their guard against these types of intruders and imposters.

Professor Norman Geisler says that Western churches would do well to remember their past failures to abide by and edify their members with sound doctrine. Geisler says these churches should continue the centuries-old Christian practice of teaching new members about God’s revelation in history, and the unquestionable authority of *Bible-based* Christian doctrines.²⁴⁸

In today’s Western churches there is an increasingly important role for holy apologists to play, holy apologists like Wells and Geisler. The Church of Jesus Christ remains in great need of men and women who are rooted and grounded in love and the truth of God’s Word, saints who are able to expose satanic lies with biblical truth, mature men and women of God who are able to defend their weaker brothers and sisters from the New Age movement and other hungry wolves seeking to devour the flock. May the Lord, in His great mercy, send us many more of these holy apologists—and quickly.

²⁴⁸ Geisler and Rhodes, 6-14.

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